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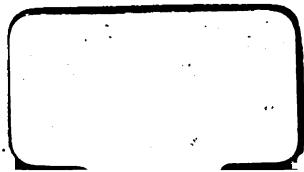
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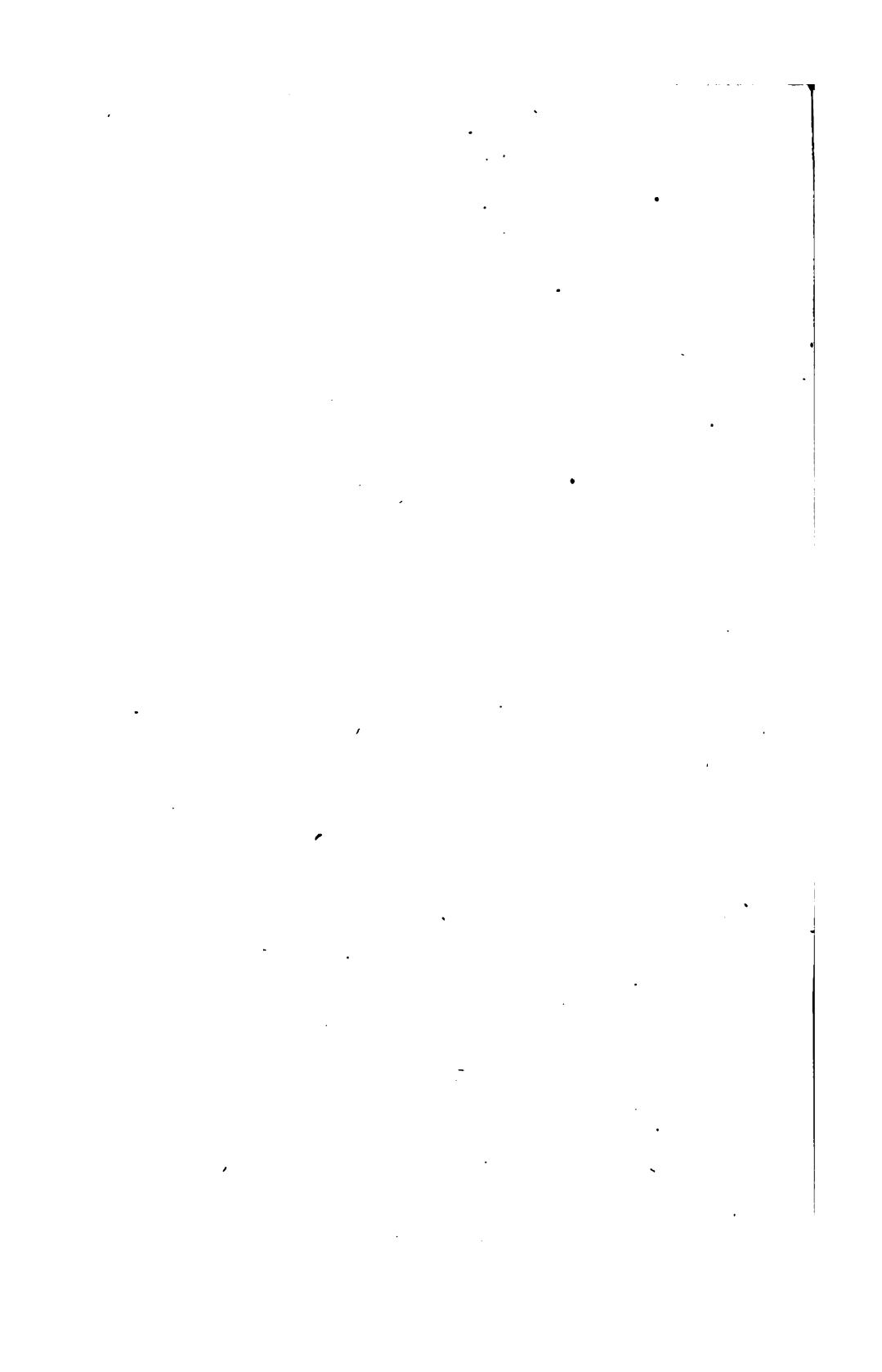
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A RIGHT-MINDED WOMAN.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

FRANK TROLLOPE.

VOL. I.

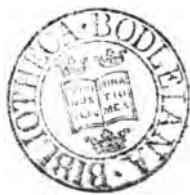


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A RIGHT-MINDED WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is no country in the world where the scenery is more pleasing than in England. It is true, it has no majestic mountains—no tremendous cataracts—no extensive forests : but it has tranquil streams, and green slopes, and swelling hills, and quiet homesteads. Animated nature, too, is in perfect harmony with the scenery. The eagle soars not from the thunder-stricken mountain, nor does the light gazelle bound from cliff to crag : but the bleating sheep, the patient ox, and the useful

horse, repose in the verdant pasture ; whilst
the

"Lark at heaven's gate sings,"

giving it a distinctive character of pleasant-
ness.

We request our reader to go with us to a thoroughly English scene, where a clear, rippling streamlet meanders through a piece of waste land or common, by the side of which a gigantic oak spreads its branches far and wide—upon which the setting sun is shedding its soft beams, illuminating the landscape with a breadth of light and depth of shade that would make any scene in any country interesting.

It was the evening of a fine day in April, in —, that a group of men were assembled round an oaken bench in front of the principal inn of a small and thinly populated hamlet, in one of the eastern counties of England.

The inn was one of those old-fashioned hostelries which afforded no comfort within,

but without exhibited an appearance, if not of architectural beauty, of a style of building that may still be seen in many villages in the eastern counties, with pointed gables, sloping roof, tall chimneys, and what, more than all, gave it such a picturesque character—a curiously-carved oaken porch, with a singular weathercock on its top. From this porch the sign-board, painted by no unskilful artist, jutted half-way between the house and the noble tree, which, upon windy nights, kept up a continual grating noise to the discomfort of the wayfarers who happened to have taken up their abode within.

The gigantic oak, around the trunk of which a settle had been constructed, heaven alone knows how many ages before our tale commences, was opposite the inn; and on this patriarchal bench it was that old men and young were in the habit of sitting, not only to discuss the merits and demerits of ale, but to dissect the characters of their neighbours; and from this time-worn settle flowed on that

interminable stream of gossip, through the medium of which we shall be enabled to give our readers an insight into our present history.

At no great distance from the alehouse, and immediately opposite the oak-settle, ran a clear, placid brook,—which was as smooth as it was quiet, its surface rarely disturbed except by the occasional darting of a sprightly fish—the course of the stream being marked by the alders and the willows which grew luxuriantly on its banks.

The village, or rather hamlet, had only one street, if street it could be called, and that a very straggling one. It had a piece of land, or common, distinguished by the inhabitants as “The Green,” which, at this particular time, was gaily decorated with daisies. Here the peasants used to congregate to indulge in cricket, quoits, and other healthful pastimes; and on the particular evening, which we have to record, there were numerous groups of men and women, all engaged in animated dis-

cussion relating to the coming May-day festival—a day, in those good old times, when mirth and kindly feelings were exhibited throughout the length and breadth of “Merrie England,” but which are now nearly worn out, leaving us a sadder but, we hope, a wiser people.

The rustic population, in those times, had many holidays ; but the most remarkable and joyous was May-day, and however much we may consider many of the games and sports, in which the peasantry then indulged, puerile and unworthy the attention of manhood, we look back upon those revelries with much complacency—with the same kind of pleasant regret that a man reflects upon the pranks and gambols of his boyhood, enjoying at once the remembrance of the past and the more highly cultivated taste of the present, delighting in the extravagances of youth, but quite content that they can never be repeated.

Some such reflections, perhaps, occupied the elderly persons seated on the oaken settle,

as they gazed upon the youngsters on the green; but if so, their reveries were often interrupted by remarks such as the following—

"It was a fine spring mornin', Measter Winks; I've been a prickin' oot the early salary; but, dearee me, I sha'n't save one of my colly flower plants."

"Yes, neebor Winks," said another, "it's all labor lost. My spring cabbage plants be all cut off; why, it wasn't more than a week agone sin' we had a white frost, when we ought to ha' had rain. The ground's as hard as Lawyer Flint's black heart, and as dry as a man's mouth arter eating a red herring."

"Ay, ay," said a third, "that may be all true. 'Twas a fine spring morn, ne'ertheless; but I must say I'd have liked a leetle more rain, and a peep or two more o' the sun."

"What an ungracious lot ye are," said an old man in a grey coat, with large gilt buttons. "Nothing seems to satisfy or please you. If the sun shines, ye wish it would rain—if it rains, ye blame the sun for not shining—if it's

cold, ye think it ought to be hot—and if it's seasonably wet, ye wish it would be dry! I wonder what sort of weather ye would have if ye had the ordering it, instead of a bountiful God! Why, ye ungrateful creatures, I verily believe, if ye had the sun in one hand, and the water clouds in the other, ye would want the wind under your arms; and even then ye would be dissatisfied."

This was said by a person who was evidently looked up to by his neighbours as the parish oracle; and as he will figure to some extent in our tale, we will describe his personal appearance. He was a tall muscular man, with thin, bony hands, and scraggy neck, browned by long exposure to the atmosphere, an intelligent forehead, and rather piercing eyes. His extreme height, was decreased by a stoop which hard work, not decrepitude, had brought upon him, and his legs were miserably thin and lanky. His appearance bore evident marks of a superiority to those around him, marks indicated by

a well-brushed beaver, a decent grey coat, well-polished shoes, and a stout blackthorn stick, all bespeaking, what his neighbours admitted; that, comparatively, he was well-to-do in the world; and so, in truth, Thomas Goodman was.

"Yes, yes," replied the garrulous Winks, "it's all very well what ye say about being ungrateful for the many blessings we get, but ye can't do away with the fact that the early crops have suffered; but dearee me, neebors, have ye heer'd the news which Master Patch, the shoemaker, has brought over from Norwich?"

"I dare say 'tis nothing of consequence; Master Patch has always some cock-and-bull story to relate when he comes back from Norwich," cried one of the party.

"But I should like to hear what the news is," said Goodman.

"Why, master, Lunnun, they say, is all in a ferment, like my beer barrel after a thunder storm. The Papists, they say, have gotten

the upper hand, and sent a hundred bishops to the Tower."

"That's news, indeed, if it be true," cried another of the listeners.

"True!" continued Winks, "there's no doubt it's true—and, what's more, they say the Papists are going to burn the King at Smithfield."

"Nonsense, Winks; the King, they say, is a Papist, and 'dog won't eat dog.' And as to the hundred bishops being sent to the Tower, why, there ain't half a hundred bishops in all England."

"I tell you," retorted Winks in great excitement, "the bloody-minded Papists swear they'll burn the King at Smithfield."

"Pshaw!" said a wiry little man, "the King himself is a Papist, and ain't that the reason we can't abide him."

"Oh! is that the reason; why I thought Papists were all monks and nuns? How can the King be a monk or a nun—he don't live in a cellar?"

"And no bad place either," said another with a chuckle, "if it had a hogshead of beer in it."

"Pshaw! I mean cellars and such like places as you see at the old Priory."

"Nonsense, neebor; Papist be only t'other name for Catholic."

"You don't say so! Why I always thought Papists were a murdering, blood-thirsty set of people, such as them that set fire to Lunnun in blessed King Charles the Second's time."

"Well, now, I never heered such stuff; why, everybody knows it wasn't the Papists that fired Lunnun—it was the plague."

"Sure, neebor, who ever know'd a disease setting a place on fire!"

"Why, sure enough, there's St. Anthony's fire—and St. Anthony was a Catholic—so it must have been the Papists who fired Lunnun."

"Well, now, there's some reason in that, anyhow; but I heer'd there wasn't only seven

bishops sent to the Tower, and a pretty outcry there is among the mob, who swear they'll be revenged on the Papish priests if they don't release them."

"There's a talk of sending over for Prince William."

"What! him they call Prince of Oranges?"

"Yes."

"Well, all I say is—and I am a loyal man—heaven forbid the king should have his way; if he do, we shall have back all the black fry with the mummeries, and penances, and crossings, and bells, and incenses, and such like, and lighted candles."

"No doubt, no doubt, neebor; the tallow-chandlers talk of raising the price of candles already."

"I have heard, too, that the Pope of Rome is to be King."

"Well, neebor, I hope your head won't ache till the Pope rules over England again. No, no, the nobles won't stand that any how. The Pope of Rome in England indeed!"

“Rome’s not in England, neebor; it’s in foreign parts; I’ve heard say it’s an old-fashioned place, built by two brothers, who were suckled by a wolf—at least, so Master Burnet says, and he’s as learned as a book.”

“More’s the pity, neebor; but for his book learning he might have been an honest, hard-working man like the rest of us,” chimed in Winks.

“So he might, Measter Winks, so he might; but it’s all along of old Burnet’s pride wishing to make his boy a wiser man than himself. What dost thee think, Measter Cheese?”

“Think! why, I think a man who stands in the high road with his face to the wind is sure to get the dust in his eyes. I think old Burnet would have done better if he had placed his boy in some honest trade, and then he wouldn’t have brought shame upon his own head, and disgrace upon his family.”

“Well, as to that, Master Cheese, the old Priory up there has been the ruin of the

whole family ; it's turned old Burnet's brain, and makes him fancy himself and his daughter grander people than their neighbours; not but what Susan Burnet is a very decent sort of girl—aye, and a beautiful girl, too—but, mark my words, Master Cheese, she'll come to harm one of these days ; folks never do well that set themselves up above their neighbours, and I doubt—”

“ Tut, man, you doubt !” said Goodman, striking his stick upon the bench, “ I should like to see the man who would dare to say a word against the honour or the kind heart of my god-daughter, Susan Burnet !”

“ I meant no offence to thee, or thy god-daughter, Master Goodman, but old Burnet's pride everybody talks about.”

“ Then more's the pity that ye haven't something more profitable to employ your time and your tongues upon. As I told ye before, nothing pleases or satisfies ye. First ye vent your ingratitude to a merciful and

bountiful God about the weather, and next ye break out into back-biting your neighbour, because he's not like yourselves! I tell you John Burnet is as far above you as the clouds from the earth—he's an honour to his fellow men—he's a good husband, a good father, a good friend, and would scorn to speak ill of his neighbours, rich or poor. If his son has done evil it's not for want of good advice and good example, and the boy must suffer the penalty of his imprudence; and take my word for it, he will suffer too. But is it well of ye to slander a man because he has been an over-indulgent father, and borne a name in the world that his bitterest enemy has never dared to call in question for integrity. I would I could say as much for his neighbours," clutching his stick firmly he arose, and without another word, but with a look of scorn, walked away.

"Well, neebors, what d'ye think of that? Master Goodman is in a bit of a tantrum I

consider; but he's a worthy man for all that, so we ought not to blame him for speaking up for his best friend."

" But he's got a bit o' the devil in him, I'm thinking; and, sure enou', when he does kick over the traces, he kicks friends and foes."

Again the old men resumed their gossip, feeling a little relieved by the absence of Goodman, whose superiority and intelligence kept a somewhat tighter curb upon their tongues than they liked.

The old man strode quickly across the foot-bridge, muttering and mumbling to himself numerous pishes and pshaws, till he got some distance on the green, and his ruffled temper became calmer. At length he laughed at his own impetuosity; once or twice he stopped to look at a group of quoit players and cricketers, who were enjoying those invigorating games after a day of considerable labour.

His step was more frequently arrested to

say a kind word to some rosy-cheeked urchin, for whom he had also a cake, and to delight both himself and a joyous group of children, by throwing an apple for them to scramble after, tumbling one over the other, and laughing and yelling with the pleasure and excitement.

Despite his irony and satire, Goodman was the most popular man in the hamlet, and even those upon whom he let fly his shafts of irony, and at times (as we have seen) his anger, all stood in awe of him, and all respected him.

There was something sententious, and at times satirical, in his remarks ; but his actions gave constant evidence of generosity, frankness, and unaffected benevolence. If any opinion was required touching the culture of land or the breed of cattle, Goodman was the oracle appealed to ; if disputes arose, Goodman was asked to decide the knotty points ; if children wished to hear a nursery rhyme or a marvellous tale, no man had so great a

budget; and although, when telling his diverting stories, he would good humouredly stigmatise his eager listeners as “little imps,” “tiresome brats,” “intolerable torments,” yet the children all loved the old man and the old man loved the children.

It was not to be wondered at that Master Goodman became somewhat self-opinionated, it would have been more surprising had he been otherwise, considering that he was appealed to on every occasion by his neighbours, and his dictum was with them infallible. This weakness was, in truth, the principal point of depreciation in the old man's otherwise amiable character.

We have intimated Goodman's lingering every now and then to gaze upon the various groups who gambolled on the sunny common, but there was one which peculiarly arrested his steps, as well as his attention, causing a smile of complacent satisfaction to light up the strongly marked, and what might be termed, hard features of the worthy old man, when the

principal figure of the group, immediately she beheld him, left her companions, and with the light fleetness of foot of the fawn, came tripping up to him. Nor can we wonder at Master Goodman's delight, aged as he was, at seeing the figure of a girl of some eighteen or nineteen, a woman perhaps in age, but a term which no one could apply to sweet Blanche Stewart; a slight, agile girl, with eyes as bright and blue as the summer sky, golden locks dancing in the breeze, and with a singular mixture of artlessness and humour lighting up her countenance, which was a perfect transcript of her mind—child-like in vivacity, in guilelessness, and glee—child-like almost to petulance and irritable haste—kind, confiding, and forgiving.

Tripping up to Goodman, she stopped abruptly, and with a look demure as a church mouse, which was belied by the arch raillery of her eyes, she made a low courtesy, bidding him good evening.

The old man took both the girl's hands in

his, as he replied, "Good evening to you, my child—but what is it brings you from the Rookery to-day?"

"What should bring me from the Rookery, but my own sweet will, and a desire to look upon the fresh blue sky and to breathe the pure air, as well as to enjoy the sports on the common, after being shut up so long with stiff brocades, surly looks, and surlier answers; and, above all, to see and speak to those who always meet me with kindly looks and kindly faces."

"But your own sweet will, my pretty lass, would hardly be sufficient to bring you *here*, as I don't think it took you *there*."

"You are right, Master Goodman, right in both suppositions. Lady Esther's leave brought me here, and your kindness took me there; and I thank both you and her ladyship."

"Are you not happy there, my child, that you are so anxious to get away?"

"Ye-ye-yes! it would be very ungrateful

if I said I was not happy ; for I am sure you meant me well—but—but Lady Esther is a disagreeable, ill-natured, fussy old maid. I cannot—”

“ Whist ! my little maid, never speak ill of masters and mistresses ; kindness begets kindness, and brings its own reward.”

“ Yes ! but she has no kindness, except for her dog—she’s as surly as a bear ; and I’m sure she has no right to be so, for I have done everything in my power to please her. I’m sure I only want—”

“ Ah ! my dear girl, never go in search of your wants ; if they be real wants, they will come home in search of you.”

“ What you say, Master Goodman, is all very true, no doubt, but you must admit that it’s very wearisome to be using all your best endeavours to please, and never to receive a kind look, or a “ well done ” for your pains. You don’t forget praise when it’s due, even to your plough boy—ah ! your very horses set their shoulders to the wheel

when they hear your cheerful, kind ‘ Well done, Dobbin ! ’ ”

A tear came into the old man’s eyes as he again took both the girl’s hands in his own, saying : “ Patience, my good child.”

“ Yes ! it’s all very well to talk of patience, but—”

“ Patience is a great virtue, and—”

“ Ill-nature,” interrupted the girl, “ and an ungenerous nature are equally great vices.”

“ Listen, my pet.”

“ It’s all very well to talk of listening and having patience ; but she must be more than an angel who could bear with the surly manners and the unkind actions of Lady Esther, who sits as bolt upright in her arm chair as if she and her brocaded silk dress were all of a piece, without a good word or a kind thought for any one but herself and her lap-dog. Patience, indeed ! ”

“ Yes, dear Blanche, we have all need of it in this world—the serving man gets the cuffs and sharp words, but the master has to

endure the most care—the plough-boy sleeps soundly after his day's labour, sleeps soundly all through the night upon his straw pallet, but the farmer is kept awake by the raging storm, and thinks of the damage to his corn and his cattle—and as for Lady Esther—”

“ Don't talk of the stony-hearted old frump, she looks like one of her old ancestors cut out of stone, in the church, and with about as much feeling; she and her housekeeper, and her prim lady's-maid—like mistress like maid—all seem carved out of the same block, the flinty old creatures. Lady Esther is always preaching to me about the danger of beauty and the beauty of the mind. I don't know what her mind may be like; but her beauty. Ha! ha! ha! my goodness!” and she burst into a thrilling peal of laughter.

“ Your goodness, Blanche,” said the farmer, with an effort not to join in the girl's merriment; “ stick to that! an ounce of goodness is worth a pound of beauty. For my part, I can't think what all the lads see

in you to be raving and prating about your good-for-nothing little impish face. The louts go nigh to spoil thee with their folly."

"Well, Master Goodman!" returned Blanche, with an arch but loving smile. "Well! I am surprised! You put me in mind of 'the pot calling the kettle black;' you ought to be the last man in the world to tell me of people spoiling me."

The old man gave her an affectionate smile, and, patting her cheeks, said, "You're an impertinent, saucy-faced, little minx. It's no use arguing with you, for you always get the better of me. But, my child, you have not told me—how is your grandmother?"

The girl's face changed like an April day; the sunlight disappeared, a cloud came over; and a tear stole into her eyes as she replied sorrowfully—

"Oh, Master Goodman, she is very ill, nearly bed-ridden," and she burst into tears.

"Don't cry, my lass; you've been a good child, and done your duty in every way; no

daughter could have done it better. She has been a great burden to you; but Heaven will reward you for duties well performed."

"Oh! I don't regret or repine at the duties I have had to perform, for I would have done ten times as much if I could, without a murmur; but the happy days of my childhood seem all to have fled and left me nothing but gloom. Oh! I often think of the joyous summer days when I used to sit under the shade of the old oak and sing blythe songs to my dear kind grandmother, and of the winter evenings by the fire, when she used to sit spinning, and telling me tales of bygone times, and about my father and mother—but now, alas! *she* cannot see, and *I* don't care to sing;" and, throwing her arms round the old man's neck, she burst into a flood of tears. "Oh! Master Goodman, those happy times seem for ever flown."

"Tut—tut," said the old man, with quivering lips, "you silly monkey, the past looks pleasanter because it is past, but the present

and the future will look brighter after the passing clouds are dispersed. But I can't stand wasting my time talking any longer, for I'm going to see my worthy friend, Burnet. What, blushing, Blanche? what's in the name, lass, that brings the colour into your cheeks. Away with you, my dear child, and join your young friends, and return to the Rookery;" and, giving her another kiss, Goodman walked away, full of tender thoughts for his young favourite.

CHAPTER II.

THE glorious sunset, which flooded the village green with brightness, shed its golden rays, giving a somewhat cheerful aspect, to an avenue of splendid trees that led to Oakfield Hall, and causing long shadows from both animate and inanimate objects; trees, which, at any other season than winter, were impervious to sunlight, the foliage being so thick that not a gleam penetrated, making almost nocturnal gloom even when that mid-day sun shone full upon them. Along this avenue, which was destitute of everthing in the shape of verdure, might be seen, on this April evening, a man,

apparently well stricken in years, who, though looking older, was, in reality, younger than Farmer Goodman, whose neatness in dress and otherwise praiseworthy attention to his person, made him appear nearly, if not quite, as young as John Burnet, the individual we have just introduced on the landscape, whose dress was carelessly put on and hung loosely about his person, a thick stubble covering his unshaven chin, and his slovenly appearance and apparent absorption denoted either an unsound mind, or else that his soul was so engrossed upon one particular subject which admitted no other to occupy either his time or his attention.

In height, he was above the average, but remarkably thick set; his head was one that would have been selected by an artist to enrich the shoulders of a saint; he had a large aquiline nose, piercing blue eyes, a massive forehead, and bald head. His brows wrinkled, and marked strongly with lines or furrows, gave indication of either much mental

agony or deep thought, perhaps a mixture of both. Such was John Burnet, the keeper of Oakfield Hall, or (as it was still called) the Priory, which, on the suppression of the lesser monasteries, had been granted to a family of the name of Howard, in whose service had lived three generations of the Burnets.

The Howards, like many other noble families, had fallen into difficulties, and acre after acre of the broad lands of Oakfield, had been sold till only the ruinous old Priory and some few acres of land were left to Sir Gerald Howard, the depraved and worthless descendant of a once wealthy, honourable, and ancient family, who, instead of taking up his abode at Oakfield, left both house and lands in the hands of an uncle, and went to Vienna, where, it was reported, he was killed in some disgraceful fray with gamblers and drunkards, the particulars of which were never correctly ascertained. With this uncle, John Burnet lived in the capacity of steward, and was an especial favourite,

taking the entire management of all his affairs. After a few years the uncle died, leaving the entire property to his faithful friend and steward.

This is a brief sketch of the man who was seen advancing up the avenue, his head bent down, his eyes half closed, as if in deep thought, apparently quite unconscious of surrounding objects, except that now and then he would strike off a twig from the trunks of the trees, an act which at another time he would have severely reprimanded in another ; ever and anon stopping suddenly as if to gaze on the rich pastures, but which in reality he saw not. John Burnet, with the ordinary feelings of a disappointed father, had to contend with those of a somewhat proud, but strictly honourable and sternly moral man. His pride was not such as his rustic neighbours gave him credit for. He was not proud of being the fortunate possessor of Oakfield and its surrounding acres, but of inheriting an unblemished character handed

down to him by many generations of his forefathers. It will, therefore, be easily imagined what gall and bitterness it was to such a man that disgrace should attach to his only son—a disgrace which the father considered not only as reflecting on himself, but which affected even the religious society of which he was a worthy and honoured member. Still, John Burnet felt that he was a father. His son, who had arrived at an age when he ought to have been a solace, as well as a companion and an assistant—a son upon whom he might have expanded his heart, and found an affectionate and loving response. But, alas! that son, instead of being his pride and joy, was the associate of the most profligate gamblers and drunkards.

As Burnet approached the end of the avenue, he suddenly came to a full stop, and looked earnestly at a figure apparently coming to meet him; but the shadows made it difficult for the old man to distinguish who the advancing person was.

"It cannot be he," he muttered; "he would not dare to come here. Let him remain with his vile associates whom he likes better than home—better than his father—his friends," and as he uttered the words, he clenched his stick more firmly, raising it as if about to strike the intruder. He, however, speedily lowered it, as Goodman stood before him.

"How does the world use ye, Burnet?" cried Goodman, holding out his hand to his old friend; "you look purely, but methinks you are not overwise to be walking with your head bare to the sky, and more especially, after such an attack of rheumatiz as you have lately had; where's your beaver?"

"Don't talk to me of a bare head whilst I've a breaking heart, friend Goodman; what matters how the body fares when the mind's ill at ease. I'm a father without a son."

"Tut, tut, neighbour, don't talk in that strain. Have you not other and better ties—a wife! aye, as good, virtuous, pains-taking

a wife as the world can produce: and a daughter, such as the highest and wealthiest in the land might feel proud of—my own dear god-child, bless her sweet face, who is a comfort to us all, and whose bright countenance and amiable disposition makes her beloved by all who know her; why, then, do you grieve for him more than the others?"

" Because, old friend, it is human nature to do so. Are we not taught out of the Blessed Book that we should leave the ninety-and-nine sheep in the wilderness to seek for that which was lost? Must I not mourn his loss—the boy whom I watched over, and prayed for in infancy; who was my pride and hope as he grew up—who was so brave, so noble! Oh! you cannot enter into my feelings. It is true, as you say, I have one of the best of wives, and a dearly loved and affectionate daughter; but wife and daughter are not my son, my only son—my first-born—who should be the perpetuator of my name, the prop of my old age—oh! my son, my son!" and

the heart-stricken father wept bitterly. "I have loved that boy, Goodman, better, I fear, than my God; better than we ought to love any human creature, and I am properly punished," and John Burnet drew himself up and dashed the tears from his eyes indignantly. "I'll not cry, Goodman, I'll not cry; my heart shall burst before I cry. A father's tears are too precious to be wasted upon such an ingrate. I would not shed another tear to save his life."

The poor old man belied his words, for in spite of all his efforts, nature would have its way, and the tears continued to roll over his cheeks.

"Come, come, my worthy friend, do not despair; many worse than James have been penitent, and restored to position by patience and prudence."

"Never, never, Goodman, lost honour is never found. Who shall restore my respected name? dearer to me than all else in the world. Could every shilling I possess pur-

chase back honour to my unhappy boy, I would gladly give it."

"Again I ask—'what need of all this heart-breaking and mourning?' I tell you, many astray sheep has been brought back to the fold, and I have seen yours, and spoken to him, and—"

"Say ye so!" interrupted Burnet. "What! seen my son? when and where was he?"

"This morning, at the Royal Oak; he was with some gallows bird, some unhanged companion."

"Companion! yes, some gambler or swindler; alas! alas! he would rather be the associate of the very lowest scum of society than of the mother who bore him, the sister who loves him, or the father who fostered him. So let him, Master Goodman, let him keep to the company of those whose brutal and lustful natures cannot be damaged by his contact; oh! would that he had never been born! and that's a hard saying for a father who has loved his son as I have mine."

"Then why say it," observed Goodman ; "a bad youth there's no denying it, but there be thousands worse than he—he's neither thief nor murderer ; and, bad as he is, he has done nothing by which he can be laid hold of by the law. Come, come, it might have been worse."

Burnet sank upon the stump of a tree, and sobbed violently, covering his face with his hands, whilst Goodman leaned on his stick, sympathising heartily with his sorrowing companion, and in spite of all his pretended firmness, tears would force themselves over his manly cheeks. After a short pause he continued—

"Well, all I can say is, if a son of mine had served me so, I'd never give him a moment's thought."

"That's because you never had a son to serve you so," cried the almost maddened father, hastily starting up. "You know not what it is to watch over a son, an only son, from infancy to manhood as I do. First the

babe, the little helpless, speechless innocent, comes weeping and wailing into a wicked world, dependent upon its parents (under Heaven) for very life, lying in its helpless, careless, fearless state, sleeping without dreams, waking without prospects, and oh ! how blessed a thing should it never awake to sin and sorrow—to the cares and troubles which beset all human beings—but the father does not think so ; he sits and watches the sleeper with a swelling heart, and dares scarcely breathe lest he should disturb his darling. And then, when the penalties of existence, and the fearful maladies of childhood come upon it, oh ! how he prays, and weeps, and watches, till the child is awakened. And then the boy begins to lisp, and to walk, and to think ; oh ! you know not what it is to see, every hour and every day, the mind open, and the understanding expand itself, and there is not a day passes but some fresh faculty displays itself, like the opening bud of some choice plant ; and then the boy

jumps and gambols with all the exuberant feelings of childhood. The boy is timid before strangers, and shy, and speaks not, but to his father he gives all his confidence—is joyful, and feels secure, and he knows what it is to have a father. He walks with his protecting hand, and listens to his voice. At such times, friend Goodman, who would not envy the feelings of a father? And soon arrives the time when the boy must be educated ; and then comes strength and vigour, and the first parting to be endured, and happy meetings to be enjoyed—the father looking with undisguised pleasure on the flush of health and the glow of ardour on the boy's brow, almost jealous, and wishing himself a boy again, that he might run and gambol like his son.

“ Then come the passions ; yes, my friend, the dark, turbulent passions ; ” and a sigh of anguish came over Burnet’s countenance, “ and the father resists them ; aye, day by day, the father resists them. At length

manhood comes; and then the father's task is done. He is helpless for more; and if, friend Goodman, if the son is *lost*—if shame, and dishonour, and guilt, and infamy blast the son, shall not the poor, wretched father break his heart?"

It would have been an interesting scene to a bystander, but one none could witness, for Burnet's pride would have resisted such an effusion of grief before any other being: for not even in the presence of his wife and daughter had he ever exposed his agonized feelings.

Solitude had not been able to draw a murmur from him; but before his friend, an aged man like himself, one whom he knew to be the soul of honour, whose sympathy was as sincere as his manners were simple—before his friend he let loose the floodgates of his innermost heart and soul, and allowed the hitherto suppressed current to overflow.

Goodman was silent for some minutes; but at length said—

“ Come, come, neighbour Burnet, ye’re a wiser man, and a more learned man, and what is more, a better man nor me, and there is but little reason that I should attempt to teach you what is fitting and right. No doubt, grief will have its way ; and it is a bitter fact, a bitter trial to have a thankless child ; but for all this, to my mind, you are not acting a Christian or a Godly part in hurting yourself with so much sorrowing : for in the event of the case being past hope, grief will not mend it ; and if it may be bettered, why, sorrow is not the way. You’ve been used to trust in a higher Power ; and to say that afflictions are the Almighty’s chastenings, sent for wiser and better purposes than we—poor, grovelling creatures—can see into. Man’s ways are not God’s ways ; and why should you throw down your staff just when the road is the roughest ? Remember, too, Master Burnet, you are the head of a family, who look up to you for guidance, for courage, and for support ; aye, and for comfort too. And

are not these good reasons that you should bear your burdens more bravely?"

"You are right, quite right," replied John Burnet, "and I take shame to myself for allowing my feelings to get the upper hand; but it's one thing to say, 'Be ye comforted,' and another to be comforted! Moreover, I tell you, had it been the loss of all my worldly wealth, or health, or anything but loss of honour, I had borne it better. Men will say, 'It's all the old man's fault; why did he not teach his son better?' And yet I did all that the most devoted, fondest father could do. I was ever pointing out to him what was right and what was wrong; and I sent him to school at Norwich—"

"Where," interrupted the farmer, "he got acquainted with that scapegrace, Frank Middleton, and such like rascallions—plague take them all! It's the worst thing in the world to give a lad more learning than belongs to his station."

"And who will say that I did so, Master

Goodman ? Why, man, if he become the master of Oakfield, he may hold up his head with the bravest and best of them ; and then, if he would but keep within the bounds of decency, and give up his sinful life, and forget Blanche Stewart, and marry some gentle damsel of the country side.”

“ But all this is in case Sir Gerald Howard should never cast up ; and you have, over and over again, told me you were never satisfied about his death.”

“ My doubts are well nigh ended now. I have talked with a man who saw him fall in that affray in Vienna. My poor old master made that witness swear to the truth of his statement ; and though a report was raised that Sir Gerald had since been seen amongst a band of Italian brigands, that report rests on very slight foundation. And even if he had escaped the Vienna brawl, the hands of justice have passed so severely over the Italian States that it is barely possible he should have escaped the slaughter of the brigands.”

“ Then you will give up your caution, and enjoy the estate in your keeping.”

“ I will give up neither my honour nor my honesty, Goodman ; but continue to enjoy the applause of my conscience.”

“ Tut, tut, Master Burnet, you need not take me up so roundly. The man lives not that dares charge me with dishonesty in word or deed. Erring sinners we all are ; and we need not the parson to tell us so. I have ever kept faith with my fellow men in the matter of my worldly dealings ; but I see no reason why a man should not live upon what is lawfully left him.”

“ Why, look ye, my worthy friend, if Sir Gerald Howard did not perish in that scuffle, the will of my late patron is not worth a straw ; and though the law could not punish me for spending every shilling so placed in my hands, I have ever felt both pride and pleasure in drawing nothing but my salary from the estate ; and, consequently, I have been enabled to double the value of the pro-

perty. If Sir Gerald should ever reappear, he shall at least respect the character of his steward. It was upon this very subject that I was anxious to see you, and to get your advice. To free my son from embarrassments, which his reckless life has brought him into, I was compelled to transmit to London a considerable sum of money, and in consequence of serious losses—owing, as you know, to the failure of the crops, disease among my sheep, and the badness of the times—I was unable to raise the amount required upon my own little property. So, rather than see my son rot day by day in a loathsome gaol, I borrowed money from Scrapeall, the lawyer, upon the south pastures of the Oakfield lands. I expected to be able to repay the debt from some money which I have to receive, but have been disappointed; and Scrapeall will not wait. In this dilemma, I want a friend. Your landlord, Sir Richard Jenkins of Longmoor, he owes you many favours—”

“And will not refuse me anything I ask in

reason. I see it all, Master Burnet—I see it all. You would borrow the money of Sir Richard, and you don't like to ask for it yourself, but would have me do it. Why, man, the thing is as good as done. Sir Richard will never deny me such a favour."

"But he will require security?"

"Security! The only security he will ask will be your word; and that's as good, aye, and a good deal better than most men's bonds. Come, tell me how much you need, and I am certain you will have it. But I must have a promise from you in return."

"What is it?"

"That you will grieve no more about your son."

"That were easily promised, friend Goodman."

"And in this case easily performed."

"So it would if I were one of those men who promise anything and everything, but who in truth attach no value to their promises. But come, we will go up to the Hall

and you shall have a chat with the dame who will give you a hearty welcome, and Susan shall sing you one of the songs you love so well."

So saying the two friends proceeded arm in arm up the avenue, but they had not gone far when Goodman stopped suddenly, saying :

" I cannot go to the Hall with you, I have some business to transact, and I will see Sir Richard this evening about the loan you require, so that your mind may be at ease regarding old Scrapeall. Good bye, give my love to Susan, and say I will come and hear her song to-morrow.

CHAPTER III.

THE sunset was fading in the western sky, the songs of birds were hushed, and the hum of human voices was no longer heard. The firmament of Heaven was just beginning to be studded with stars, and the common, which but a short time before had been the resort of robust men and joyous lads and lasses, was now deserted, and but for the occasional barking of dogs and a sort of indistinct murmuring from the cottages in the village, there was nothing to interrupt the calm silence of the evening.

Goodman, whose parting from his worthy old friend we have just related, was once

more traversing the village green, his mind intent upon fulfilling his promise of seeing Sir Richard Jenkins that night ere he placed his head upon his pillow; and for that purpose he was on his way to Longmoor. There were several roads, or rather lanes, diverging from a common centre, which were soon lost in the well wooded country. These lanes would have proved exceedingly perplexing to a stranger, for although a post was placed in the centre with arms stretching or rather pointing to each, time and the weather had so completely obliterated the writing, that no information as to where each led could be obtained; but Goodman was at no loss which way to go. After traversing one of these green avenues for a short distance he came to two other paths intersecting each other, where was a rude piece of masonry, consisting of three stone steps, which had been placed for the purpose of allowing horsemen the more easily to mount their horses. Upon

one of these steps was seated a female figure, and by her side stood a man, one foot resting upon the lowest step, both apparently engaged in deep and earnest conversation; so much were they absorbed that they did not perceive the approach of Goodman until he was within a dozen yards of them. The female was the first to notice his approach, and started up with a faint scream, whilst at the same moment the man darted into the copice. Blanche Stewart, for she it was, came forward to meet her kind friend, but with a totally dissimilar air to that she had displayed upon her interview on the common—then her face was all smiles and sunshine, now confusion and dejection, commingled with an assumed audacity, which expressed plainly, “I know I have committed an error, but I will make the best of it.”

“My goodness, Master Goodman!” she exclaimed, “how very wrong of you to frighten me so.”

"Your goodness, my girl," said the old man, in a satirical tone, "goodness is not so easily frightened."

Blanche hung her head, but spoke not a word.

"Who was the runaway?" asked the old man, pointing significantly with his thumb over his shoulder, in the direction the cavalier had retreated.

"The runaway! What do you mean?"

"Nonsense, girl, do you think I am blind."

"Blind! no, thank Heaven," replied Blanche with enthusiasm.

"Well, then, who was the runaway I saw?" repeated Goodman.

"Oh! only a friend of mine," said Blanche, blushing deeply.

"A friend—am not *I* also your friend?"

"Yes—yes, the best and dearest of friends," exclaimed the young girl passionately.

"Then where was the necessity for one of your friends running away from the other?

Why the man bolted as if he had seen a mad bull approaching."

"Ah! but Master Goodman, you are so very particular."

"Particular, Blanche! Yes, I am particular in the selection of my friends. Friends are not over plentiful in this world. Acquaintances are thick as blackberries, and not worth the plucking; but, Blanche, a solitary green lane when the sun has sunk to rest and the gloom of evening has set in, is not exactly the right place for a modest and virtuous girl to meet even a friend," and the old man laid a strong emphasis on the word. "Blanche, Blanche! I thought better of ye."

"I will not be suspected, Master Goodman," observed Blanche, drawing herself up to her full height, and her eyes sparkling; "where there is no shame there ought to be no blame, and I will meet whom I please and speak to whom I please, without being called to account for it."

"Hush, hush, my sprightly lass, ye're a silly, saucy jade, upon whom counsel is thrown away ; but I am too old a man and too true a friend to take heed of your words. Tell me, who was your friend, and let me judge if he be a proper companion for you. I doubt him before I know who he is, for had he been an honest-intentioned man he would not have been ashamed to show his face. I never was afraid to stand face to face with either man or woman."

Blanche pouted and held down her head, but remained silent.

"Why don't ye speak, Blanche ?" continued the farmer.

"I don't choose to speak, if I'm to be taken to task for nothing."

"'Tis your own heart which chides you, Blanche, and not I."

The girl burst into tears.

"Don't cry, my child, I mean nothing but kindness by you. Come—come, dry your eyes, and tell me the lad's name."

"I will betray no one's secret, Master Goodman, so it's no use asking me."

"Well, well, Blanche, I know when you speak in that defiant tone one might as well try to move a mountain with one's little finger as persuade you from your purpose. But if my fears do not mislead me, you will live to rue the meeting of this night, and if shame and sorrow should follow, it will bring the grey hairs of your poor old grandmother with sorrow to the graye. Blanche—Blanche, I never before thought so badly of ye."

"I tell you again, Master Goodman, I will not be suspected," exclaimed Blanche with flashing eyes and figure erect, the tears forcing their way down her cheeks. "If you cannot put confidence in me, why should I trust you. I do not deserve, and I will not endure your suspicions."

"As ye like, Blanche, but suspicion is not so easily shaken off, it will stick in spite of all your efforts to get rid of it. You may say you will not be suspected, but your saying so

will not prevent suspicion. You may say, too, that you will not be protected, but you should be if I had not that on my hands that will not brook delay. I would not budge an inch till I saw you safe at ‘The Rookery.’”

“I want no protection, Master Goodman, except from your evil thoughts, which wrong me, shamefully wrong me, more than any one else will; and if I don’t go home to ‘The Rookery’ to-night, it’s nobody’s business but mine.”

“Not go home to ‘The Rookery!’” exclaimed the old man in affright; “why you are mad—stark staring mad—lost and ruined past hope.”

“And be run away with by a red cow, like Tom Thumb in the story book.”

“Don’t mock at me, Blanche, ye’re a silly, saucy girl, and I should serve ye right if I left ye to your own devices. But I will not—I will not, for my heart yearns towards ye just as if ye were my own flesh and blood. I will stand by ye whether ye will or no.”

"I tell you, Master Goodman, I am quite able to protect myself," cried the girl.

"Aye, about as well as the lamb could protect itself from the wolf were the shepherd out of the way, or the chicken save itself from the hawk, or innocence and simplicity be a match for fraud and force in this wicked world. Is it your blue eyes, maiden, or your flowing locks, or your fair face, which are to protect you?"

"No, neither one nor t'other, Master Goodman. It's my own innocence and my friend's honour that will protect me."

"Tut, tut, Blanche, they are brave sounding words, but have no more substance than the tinkling brass; innocence doesn't start up in alarm on the approach of an old friend, nor does honour lurk under a hedge, and I am sure that youngster is not far off, and if I leave you I am certain you will not be long alone; come, my girl, come with me."

"Where are you going, Master Goodman?

This is the way to ‘The Rookery.’ You surely do not mean to betray me?’

“Well said, Innocence! you are easily betrayed. But don’t fear, Blanche, this is the way to Longmoor as well as ‘The Rookery.’ I am going to Sir Richard’s.”

“And I will go home to my grandmother.”

“If I thought that, Blanche—but will ye promise to go alone?”

“If I were to promise—”

“I would not believe you, so you may as well spare the lie.”

“But if I were to promise upon my word and honour—”

“Why your word and honour would perhaps keep you here till I came back again, and then you would tell me that rather than not go home alone, you had not gone at all. No, no, Blanche, I am not so easily hood-winked, I know your ways of old.”

“Ah, now you speak like Thomas Goodman, my worthy, kind old friend—good, ex-

cellent Thomas Goodman!" cried Blanche more gleefully.

"No, no, my lass, I am too old to be taken like a trout by tickling. No, no, this is too grave a matter to be laughed over. Ye're a saucy good-for-nothing little minx, and you don't see the truth of the text that a good name's like precious ointment. No, Blanche, my child, you don't know what the first false step from the path of prudence may lead to. So be a good child and come away with me."

"But what will you do with me, Master Goodman?"

"You shall accompany me to Longmoor, and after that I will take you home."

"My grandmother will be gone to bed if I go with you to Longmoor."

"Then you will not go back to 'The Rookery?' Blanche."

"Not to-night," said the girl petulantly, "not for Lady Esther Vince, her old house-keeper, or her prim lady's-maid, or—"

"Or what Thomas Goodman," interrupted the old man kindly, "can say."

Blanche hung her head.

"I wonder, Master Goodman, you grudge me the little liberty I have to enjoy ; you are worse than [frumpish Lady Esther's house-keeper."

"Does the housekeeper know that you are to stay at your grandmother's?"

"Yes, and the steward too. He was glad for me to come out."

"I have not the least doubt of that. I'll be bound ye're a regular torment to them all."

"Bless you, Master Goodman, 'tis confer- ring quite a benefit upon the old steward ; if he were never teased he would never be able to display that great virtue which you are always preaching about—patience."

"Well, Blanche, I don't know what has come over me, but I don't like this staying out of nights. I don't fear ghosts and goblins, but I have a weight on my mind that seems to foreshadow some great evil."

“ La, Master Goodman, don’t go on talking of ghosts and omens, you are enough to frighten one; just, too, as the dusk is settling down so fast.”

“ Well then, my child, come with me and I will see you safe.”

“ But you cannot come from Sir Richard’s past my grandmother’s cottage.”

“ Why, let me see, I shall go by the mill and across the plantations.”

“ That will never do, I should not get home by midnight. I will walk with you as far as the middle stile, and then go home to my grandmother’s.”

“ That’s a good lass, and as sure as my name is Thomas Goodman ye shall have a new set of ribbons fit for a queen.”

“ Thank you—thank you. I am to be the May Queen, Master Goodman,” said Blanche, placing her slender arm within that of the sturdy old man, as they began to traverse one of the roads which formed the cross-way. “ I am to be May Queen; it was all

settled to-night, and Master Overwise, the schoolmaster, is to be Baron Bombast—oh! we shall have such fun!" and the light-hearted girl ran on with a description of the coming festival, with as much childish vivacity as if there were no such things as love and lovers in the world, or cares or sorrows to encounter.

The farmer drew her arm closer under his own, and there was deep kindness in the slight pressure which he made of that fragile arm to his side, but there was also something in that kindly pressure which smote the heart and stopped the guileless girl's vivacity, and she remained silent during the rest of the walk, whilst Goodman was too deeply engrossed with his own thoughts and reflections to break that silence which his companion seemed disposed to maintain. At length they reached the stile, from which a footpath across two or three meadows led to the cottage of Dame Stewart. Arrived at this point the old man and his young companion stopped

suddenly, and turning round confronted each other.

"So," said Goodman, in a somewhat cynical manner, "so, my lass, ye won't tell me the name of yonder shamefaced youngster?"

"Have I not already told you that I will not betray another's secret; you know I never forfeit a promise. Had it been my own, I would have told you freely."

"Was it not James Burnet?" asked the old man, abruptly.

The young girl's face became overspread with emotion, but she struggled bravely to hide her confusion, and petulantly replied—

"I don't understand the new sort of manners you have put on, Master Goodman; they don't fit you in the least; they are not your own, for many's the time you have told me that there is nothing should induce a man to divulge a secret that had been entrusted to him on his honour; and will ye tell me, you, the friend in whom I

have trusted beyond all others, will ye tell me that a secret confided to a woman is less sacred than that entrusted to a man?"

"My good Blanche—"

"It's no use good Blanching me; you are just like the rest of your sex, you can give good advice better than you can take it; and, what's more, you find it easier to preach than to practise."

"Tut, tut, child, you—"

She snatched her hand from under his arm, and, with a somewhat defiant expression of look and manner, said, "I wish you a pleasant walk, and a pleasanter office than that of prying into a poor girl's secrets."

"We part not thus, Blanche," replied the old man, seizing her by the wrist. "Ye may throw away prudence and caution, but ye shall not so easily cast off the affection and sincere regard of an old friend."

"Friend! Is it the act of a true friend to treat those whom he trusts with suspicion? I

tell you, Master Goodman, I would not inform you who is the shame-faced youngster, as you call him, were he ten times James Burnet."

"Just as ye please, just as ye please, keep your secret, that's no secret at all; for if ever my two eyes saw James Burnet, they saw him run away like a shame-faced youth as he is. Blanche, I am the more troubled on your account, for James is not a fitting companion for you—the heartless fellow."

"Shame on ye! shame on ye!" cried Blanche, the hot blood rushing over her face and neck; "he's no more heartless than yourself; he is a brave, kind-hearted, noble-minded youth, and his wildness and wilfulness are more than half those of his companions; but his generous feeling and open-hearted kindness are all his own. I don't deny that he has been wild and ungovernable. Is it unnatural for a high-spirited youth occasionally to break through the bounds of prudence. But heartless! I spurn the insinuation!" and she

stood erect, but, with difficulty, prevented her tears from flowing.

“Just the common cant of this wicked and sinful world. What, Blanche, would ye have me respect a man who can break the heart of kind loving old father, and call it kindness and high spirit? Would ye have me believe in the noble-mindedness of the youth who can mock at the tears of as worthy a mother and loving a sister as ever a man was blessed with? Don’t tell me about his bravery, his kind-heartedness, and nobleness. Plague take such men as are too proud to be prudent, too cunning to be honest, too deceitful to be true. Gambling and hard drinking are glorious deeds to excuse a man for breaking bounds; and a high spirit is but a wretched plea for a good-for-nothing youth, who brings only care and sorrow on his best friends, and who has no compunction of conscience whilst breaking the hearts and ruining the characters of a dozen silly girls like yourself, Blanche.”

"Oh! stay, Master Goodman. I deny the last charge, if I cannot rebut the others. Wild he may be, wilful he may be, disrespectful to his parents he may be; but kind and constant he is to one only."

"And that one, I suppose, is the secret keeper. Tell me, Blanche, did you ever know a bad son make a good husband? It is a bad stock to begin matrimony upon—it's a sandy rock to build one's hopes of happiness upon—but go your way, get home to your grand-dame's cottage, and back to 'The Rookery,' in the morning early. Mind the old saying 'Look before you leap,' and think twice before you take up with a profligate son, who without the least compunction, would lead a worthy and affectionate father to the brink of ruin."

"To ruin!" cried Blanche, with alarm and grasping the old man's arm, "to ruin! what do you mean?"

"I mean, Blanche, just what I tell you. My meaning is as plain as my words. I am now on my way to borrow money, to repay

what my poor old friend Burnet has been compelled to pay for his heartless son."

"Borrow money for Master Burnet!"

"Yes, even so, Blanche, to enable him to make up matters which his precious son has marred; and you may tell the youth so, an ye like. But I shall be late, so I must bid ye good evening, and may sorrow and grief light on him who would harm ye, my child."

The long repressed tears fell plentifully over the cheeks of Blanche, as the kind-hearted and benevolent man grasped and wrung the hand of the simple-hearted maiden, and departed. She allowed that hand to fall listlessly to her side, and stood with heaving breast looking fixedly after her friend.

CHAPTER IV.

WE know not how long Blanche might have remained looking in the direction Goodman had taken, but no sooner was he out of sight than a cough at a little distance caused her to turn suddenly round, and she perceived the figure of a man stealing stealthily towards her. After a bound or two he stood by her side.

“I am going to my grandmother’s cottage,” the girl said, somewhat doggedly, and she began to walk forward.

“And I will protect you, my pretty Blanche,” replied the young man.

“Master Goodman thinks I need more

protection from than by you," was the laconic reply.

"Then, by heaven, he does me foul and unmerited wrong. Bad I may be—wild, undutiful—but I swear most solemnly I never harboured a base or unholy thought against thee, my sweet Blanche."

"I told him so! James, I told him so!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "I knew you would say so; and I only wish my well meaning old friend could hear you speak the words. My goodness! what a sad thing it is for people to be of such suspicious natures."

During this colloquy they had reached the stile leading to the cottage, and James Burnet—for he it was—vaulting over it—offered assistance to his companion; but the young girl was as agile as himself, and James felt disappointed, not only that he lost the opportunity of assisting the lovely one over the stile, but of the kiss with which he expected to be rewarded for his gallantry.

"I shall grow jealous of Master Goodman, I think," said James; "you ran away with him, and left me to my fate, you ungracious girl."

"To be sure I did," she replied archly. "If I am not worth following I am not worth finding; and as for Master Goodman, I love him dearly—he is as true and trustworthy a friend as ever woman was blessed with. I wish, James Burnet, your best friends thought better of you."

"And what does he think of me, my lovely moralist?"

"He thinks you a black sheep, and a disgrace and discredit to your family and friends," said Blanche, sorrowfully.

"Then, to my shame, he does me little wrong in that, Blanche," exclaimed the young man, with something like a repentant expression overshadowing his countenance. "Yes, I feel that the worthy old man has done me no injustice in his denunciation; and, dear girl, were it not for your sparkling eyes and

cheerful countenance, and what is dearer, far dearer, than either to me — your trusting, loving heart—I should despise myself and all the world, and care not how soon my sins, and my wilfulness, and my disobedience, were blotted out of the book of life. But, dear Blanche, I feel that I am not by nature what I seem to be—a licentious, riotous, dissipated, heartless youth. No, I feel that in loving you I have something worth living for—something that will induce me hereafter to show the world that I am not the reprobate at heart that I have apparently made myself, and what my fellow man would make me."

"James!" observed Blanche, "you know not, you cannot feel what joy it produces in my heart to hear such words as you have just spoken. I often doubt whether you are in jest or earnest."

"And well you may, sweet Blanche," returned James, "for I often doubt myself. At times I feel too sad to be merry, and at

others, too merry to be sad; so what with the one and the other, I take the middle course: and often, between mirth and melancholy, reason gets the upper hand of me, and well nigh persuades me that I am little better than a fool. But, alas! Folly does not leave me in this straight, but with her bells she comes shaking and jingling them in my face till I become so bewildered that I cannot hear a word Reason has to say."

"Oh! dear James, if you would be deaf to folly, and listen to reason, spurn the dice-box and the wine-cup, and leave off bad courses and disreputable company, play-acting and such like; but you were always poring over those horrid poetry books, and play books, and trash of that kind."

"You speak truly, Blanche," broke in James; "Will Shakspeare and Ben Johnson have been the ruin of me."

"Then," exclaimed Blanche, "I wish you would tell Will Shakspeare and Ben Johnson to mind their own business, and get as drunk,

and be as dissolute as they please, if they will only leave you alone."

"And so they would, Blanche, if I could make up my mind to part with them. Oh! my friend Will—I could not part with Will Shakspeare; the love is all on one side, I assure you; the rogue has so entwined himself round my heart, and given me such concoctions, that I cannot but love and respect him," said James, with as grave a countenance as he could put on.

"Respect!—what, respect such a low, dishonest wretch, who can have no more mind than a hog!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed James; "well said simplicity, and true, too, for he was once a deer stealer, in Warwickshire."

"A deer stealer! and is that the sort of man you choose for a companion?"

"Yes; and love and admire," continued James.

"Well, I cannot understand such vagaries, but I know such a fellow is not a fitting

companion for an honest man's son, to cause him the loss of his best and dearest friends."

"No, not his dearest," cried James, raising her hand to his lips.

"Of the wisest and best, then, Master Goodman says."

"Oh, Master Goodman is a stiff-necked and starched old Puritan, and has not half, no, nor a thousandth part of the knowledge of the world, with all his preaching, that my dear old friend Will has."

"No, I dare say; nor of the wickedness of the world. Thomas Goodman is an honest man, and that is what your friend Will is not; and he's a worthy man, and a kind, good-hearted man, and that's more than he thinks you. I could not bear to hear him call you heartless."

"Did Master Goodman call me heartless?" asked James, dropping Blanche's hand, and looking sternly into her face.

"Don't look so fiercely; you positively frighten me."

"Did Goodman call me heartless?" he repeated.

"Oh! never mind what he said," cried Blanche, with a really alarmed look, "he is such a grumbler, and so suspicious."

"And you are such a very woman!"

"James! what do you mean by that?" cried Blanche, the blood rushing to her neck and face.

"Mean, dear Blanche—that you are all that a woman should be—kind, gentle, loving, confiding, and generous—that you would suffer anything to spare my feelings; but, dear girl, I beg you not to hide from me anything you may hear, however distasteful it may be to you to tell, and for me to listen to; it may tend to induce me to amend my ways."

"You are right, dear James; I will tell you all that is said, let the pain to me be what it may. You are indeed in bad repute with the people here abouts. They say that you have brought ruin upon your poor old father."

"There they lie, Blanche ; it is not so bad as that. It is true I have spent a reckless, dissipated life—a life of which I am both tired and disgusted," and the young man hung down his head and spoke solemnly ; "I have purchased experience at a heavy cost ; still, I have obtained one valuable piece of knowledge—I have learned that I am a fool—and that, you know, is the first step to wisdom. But as to ruining my father—"

"He is really in difficulties," interrupted the young girl sorrowfully.

"In difficulties!" exclaimed the youth, with anguish depicted on his countenance.

"Yes, in difficulties ; for Master Goodman has, this very night, gone up to Sir Richard's, to borrow money for your father."

"Borrow money for my father?—to borrow money for John Burnet?"

"Just so, James ; and I was as much astonished as you are when Master Goodman told me what his errand was."

"To borrow money of Sir Richard!" said

the youth sorrowfully. "Yes, I will repay him though I wear my strength and life away in toiling to do it."

"Do not speak so; all will go right—all will be well if you will but give up your wilful ways."

"But, Blanche, are you sure of the truth of Thomas Goodman's statement?"

"As certain as that I know there is a good and merciful God in Heaven. Master Goodman would not be guilty of a lie to save his life."

"Then the bitter cup is full at last!
But—"

Blanche was about to speak, when she was interrupted by the sudden approach of two men; so sudden, indeed, that the young girl shrieked, and ran away like a frightened fawn. James was more than half inclined to follow her, but a moment's consideration determined him to remain where he was, and confront the intruders.

It was not long ere the men came close up

to Burnet, who, if he did not recognise both, with one he was evidently acquainted; and he rejoiced that Blanche had so suddenly departed: for the new comers were certainly not such as he would have a young female brought in contact with.

The first was a tall and somewhat aristocratic-looking man, and rather good-looking. He bore the stamp of a man of quality; but, as far as could be judged, he had no other qualities but his own quality, and that sat ill enough on him. It is true, there was a frank, open countenance; but he was more the groom, or jockey, than the gentleman in his bearing. There might, too, be a dash of good humour, of reckless, mirthful temper in his face.

In that of his companion, there could be discovered no such redeeming virtues. He was one of those men whose countenance was the perfect index to his soul—one to whom the beholder would take an instantaneous dislike—one whose ruffianly expression was

shown by what is called “down-looking”—a slight hair-lip, ferret-looking eyes, and a turned-up nose, which, whatever colour it might once have been, had now assumed that of scarlet-and-mulberry mixed—all contributing to prove to the physiognomist an abhorrent mixture of the sensual and malignant.

The costume of these two worthies was in strict accordance with their persons, and admirable specimens of the shabby genteel—large boots, rusty spurs, and long rapiers, dirty feathers, and dingy linen—well befitting the assumed character of gentlemen, but which were unmistakeably those of men of degraded habits.

James Burnet gazed upon the most ill-favoured of the two with an expression of undisguised disgust and contempt; but the gaze had no other effect upon the ill-conditioned man than to cause an additional redness to the nose.

Turning to the other, he said—

“Why, Frank Middleton, I thought you were in London !”

“You thought wrong then, Burnet, as many others have done besides yourself. I am not in London, as you see; nor am I likely to go there for the present, as I have pressing state affairs on my hand calling me to the East. In fact, I have come down to my native neighbourhood to rusticate awhile, rub off the rust of a London life, and to look upon dun cows instead of duns of a more disagreeable character, a parcel of dirty villains who tried to take me by the heels and so I gave them leg bail.”

“And who is your worthy companion ?” asked Burnet, with a strong emphasis on the word *worthy*.

“I am very remiss in not sooner introducing you to my friend, Jack Hardbottle—not altogether an inappropriate name—for he drinks like a fish with the exception that he imbibes little water—he is a man of mettle, without gold in his pocket, but plenty of

brass in his face—loves the dice box and the dagger—has smelt powder in the low countries—and has more discretion than valour, for his wit taught him to turn his back upon his enemies, and his back shows evident witness of his tact."

" You need not remind a fellow of his misfortunes," roared Hardbottle, with a scowl overshadowing his diabolical countenance.
" You are always poking your fun at me."

" No shame in discretion, Jack. My friend Burnet knows how to keep a secret, and will tell no tales about your honourable scars."

" Curse you, and your friend, too. If either of you insult me I will give you—" thrusting his hand in his vest.

" No offence—no offence, Jack. My friend Burnet merely asked who you were, and I made a slight mistake and told him what you are."

" Well, well," interrupted Burnet, impatiently, " with who he is or what he is I

have nothing to do. I have other matters to attend to."

"So it would seem; for in truth, James, that was a remarkably well-shaped leg and marvellously pretty ankle I caught sight of just as we approached, and I'll be sworn the fairy form was accompanied by a pretty face. I confess I had little hope of finding you here, though I was told at the hostel you had strolled this way in the dusk, and my friend Jack's eyes are as keen for a pretty girl as the hound for a fox. Come, James, you must introduce us to your beauty of Thorpeton, or Hardbottle will ferret her out."

"You will have no introduction from me; so on that subject let's have no more words," and Burnet's tone and look crushed the ribald jest which trembled on Jack's tongue.

"Well, there's a go! I must lose the use of my tongue, I suppose, and go to bed with my mouth shut."

"But, Frank, what truly brought you from London?"

"A truant disposition, good, my lord."

"Pshaw! Let Shakspeare alone, and answer me like a man of the world."

"So I did. 'All the world's a stage,' and I answered you like a man of the stage. Do you think I have forgotten my cues, Burnet?"

"I have determined, Frank, to cut the stage for ever, and have no further acquaintance with the ale-cup or the dice-box."

"Well, upon my soul, what a degenerate age we are living in. Leave the stage! Then 'why upon this blasted heath you stop our way.' Cut the stage and forsake our old friend Will; what, be content 'to strut and fret your hour upon the stage and then be heard no more? Why, it's rank madness, you who have been the first and foremost at every merry-making far and near! And, James, mirth and merriment are like oil and wine to a man's spirits. But you haven't any money about you, Burnet, have you?"

"Not a tester, Frank; nor am I likely to

have any. I was on the point of applying to my father, but I have heard that which will stop my mouth, and what to do I know not."

"Never look so grave for such a trifle; money brings anxiety, and isn't he a wise man who lightens his cares? Were we in London we might hit upon some expedient for replenishing our purses. Ah! my friend, London is the true El Dorado, and I verily believe impudence is the philosopher's stone. Give me the place where a man may coin his wit into money, or where a man of ability is sure to make his way."

"Then, Frank, why did you leave such glorious opportunities, for you have the philosopher's stone if, as you say, it be impudence."

"You would not wonder at my leaving such a set of dullards as inhabit that great city at the present moment. The motley crew have no respect for genius, they call one's little peccadilloes by vile rascally terms that

really it is impossible to know precisely the name of one's own vices. What with greasy-headed magistrates, the rascally bull-dog bailiffs, ruffianly charleys, and such like vermin, it is difficult for a man of spirit and high breeding to exist; so I cut London and ran into the country."

"And now that you have got into the country how do you propose to live?"

"Live! aye, there's the rub."

"I have the will to help you, but my means—"

"Are not very extensive; so much the better—so much the better. Money's a dead weight upon a man's energies, therefore let us change it for pleasure, which your coarse-minded rabble call drunkenness and debauchery! Faugh! out upon such wretches. But I have hit upon a mine, which, if properly worked, will yield abundantly. I have a pair of loaded dice as well as a pair of loaded pistols, and if a rich fellow comes in my way it will be passing strange if one or

the other does not ease him of his filthy lucre."

"Did I not know that you were jesting, Frank, I should be tempted to call you a ruffian."

"And I perhaps should be tempted to put a bullet through your head. I am growing somewhat choleric, and hard names have become distasteful to my ears. Listen, James, I am growing in favor with the world, and though my vest is looking seedy, and my elbows somewhat lean at present, by Midsummer I shall be in full feather, and—

'Thereby hangs a tale.'

I have that to say to you which I would fain have reach no other ears than thine, and that was my reason for so unceremoniously breaking in upon your *tête-à-tête* with your Thorpeton beauty. Moreover, I was afraid you might leave this part of the country, and I not be able to find you."

"Well then, Frank, speak out now, I am quite at your service."

“ But I am not at yours. Hardbottle hath a prior claim on my time, and his ears have little to do with our words. Tell me where I am to find you, and I doubt not to interest you.”

“ Enquire for Master Fleetwood at the ‘ Royal Oak.’ ”

“ Master Fleetwood—ah! ah! the old story and the old rendezvous. By mine honour!—Yes, mine honour! I’m thinking a man who sticks to his old haunts is not likely to reform. Why, Mr. Hypocrisy, I would advise you to keep a mask upon your face, and cry ‘ how innocent I look,—ah! ah! upon my honour,’ ” and Frank broke out into a wild laugh.

“ You mistake me, Frank. It is my full determination to abandon all my evil courses.”

“ Ha! ha! James Burnet coming out as Prince Hal, with the world for a stage. Why, man, take Truth for the prologue, and Reality for a chorus—no acting, but all in down right

earnest, and let your piece be ‘ All’s Well that Ends Well.’ ”

“ Jest, not, Frank, I am in no humour for mockery. If you have aught to relate, you will find me where I told you, but you will discover in me an altered man. I will not betray your secrets, nor frustrate your plans, but into your pleasures or pursuits I will enter no more.”

So saying he pressed Frank Middleton’s hand and turned upon his heel, for he knew that by this time Blanche would have reached her grandmother’s cottage, and he walked slowly towards the village.

Frank Middleton stood gazing after him, screwing his features into as many grotesque shapes as it was possible, to the amusement of Hardbottle, who with difficulty restrained himself from bursting into a horse laugh, but Jack’s mirth, like his valour, was always tempered with discretion; in other words, by his habitual cowardice. No sooner, however, was James out

of hearing, than they both yielded to uncontrollable merriment.

“Burnet is a strange fish,” observed Frank, “and would slip his head out of the net, but it shall not be so. Look you, Jack, as long as he kept the course of a roving, rattling, jolly blade he ruled me with the tip of his finger, but if he intends becoming a puny milksop and ‘abandon all his evil courses,’ as he terms our honourable life, why I must twist him round my finger; not that I ever knew him to do a dishonest act, but he has led a wild reckless life and I have played second fiddle to him. Reform he shall not, for I should be miserable without him.”

“He’s a chicken-hearted fellow,” sneered Jack. “I should like to see that pretty little wench that ran off just as we came near him.”

“You had better be careful, Jack, for Burnet is not a man to be trifled with. It would be dangerous for a cur like you to cross the scent when he is following his game.”

"I have told you once before, Frank Middleton, if you measure not your words towards me I will measure the depth of a dagger in your ribs. I have made cold steel stick in the bones of a better man than you."

"Oh! Hardbottle, I cry your mercy. I forgot you were a soldier—but come, let us to business, and leave the girl alone, I will tell you all about her another time. If I am not mistaken she's a lass he used to call Blanche Stewart, but as I said before, let's to business. We want money, and money we will have by some means. That old man they said was gone to Longmore, that's where Sir Richard Jenkins lives. Follow me, but keep close under the hedge, we must be seen as little as possible.



CHAPTER VI.

THE village of Thorpeton presented a marvellous degree of excitement upon the morning of the following day; gossips of both sexes were full of bewilderment, strange rumours were afloat, stranger deeds—deeds of violence, of darkness—were hinted at; some persons went so far as to talk of murder having been perpetrated; but although all hinted at something horrible having occurred, no man knew for certain—intelligence seemed to get more vague as the day wore on—it became less distinct, less definite, as its circulation increased, just as a circle caused by a stone thrown into the water grows fainter as it

becomes more enlarged. Murder, however, was the point to which all the gossip seemed to tend ; murder of some one, in some shape, upon some person, and by some person, but who had been murdered, and who was the murderer, or how the murder had been committed, no one pretended to know ; but, like all cases of mystery, the gossips made it evident to their neighbours that nothing less than a murder could have been perpetrated, and that of a most horrible character.

There was, as usual, a knot of persons collected round the Inn door, the smithy, the barber's shop; and, as the village school-house was not yet open, numerous urchins were running riotously about, wishing there were murders once every week ; but the scene of the greatest consternation was an old manorial house, which, on ordinary occasions, was the most quiet place in the village. This was Longmore, the residence of Sir Richard Jenkins, where, in the large heavy antiquated hall of the house, seated in his easy chair in all

the dignity becoming one of a high-born race, Sir Richard was seen. He was one of those men who, upon ordinary occasions, had little or nothing to do, but, whenever it occurred that anything was to be done, however trifling, he surrounded it with all the show, state, and pomp that was possible. To him, therefore, this excitement was a great windfall, and it was nothing but natural that he should make the most of it.

Puffed up with self-importance, he sat nodding significantly but condescendingly, to his clerk (who was writing at the table), as his interrogatories elicited some information from the persons he was, in his capacity of magistrate, examining. Sir Richard's questions were principally confined to an old man in a dark grey coat with metal buttons, upon whose furrowed face conflicting emotions of no ordinary character chased each other in rapid succession, and whose anxious eye wandered, from time to time, from the justice, by whom he was addressed, to the figure of a

young, fair, fragile girl, who stood, with downcast looks, trembling and dejected, at some distance. She was supported by two men, who, in that quiet sequestered place, composed the entire constabulary force. Bowed down by affliction and affright, she drooped her head so low that her pale face was nearly hidden by the profusion of light golden locks which fell in loose dishevelment around it. The poor girl, apparently, could not weep, her grief was too great for tears; but there was that utter, helpless, hopeless abandonment about her, which awakened the deepest sympathy in the breasts of even the roughest listeners.

"And so, Master Goodman, you are quite certain there were only two persons?"

"I am not clear as to that, Sir Richard, for a heavy blow on the head is not the most likely thing in the world to sharpen a man's memory. And you may be sure that one can't be quite so cool and clear sighted when struggling with ruffians for one's life as if only

smoking a pipe ; but to the best of my belief, there were but two men."

"Should you know the one who struck you ?"

"I think I should not, for my eyes are not quite so good as they used to be."

"What sort of a man was he ?"

"As ungainly a looking fellow as one would wish to see."

"Tall or short ?"

"Neither the one nor the other. The first that came up was a tall strapping lad, and he asked me for my money, when instantly up came the other, who struck me a severe blow on the head, causing me to fall down as if I was in a fit." He paused, and put his hand to his head, and rubbed his eyes, as if not quite clear as to what he was saying.

"Well, sir, go on," said Sir Richard.

"The next thing I remember was feeling them ransacking my pockets."

"Did you hear them say anything ?"

"Yes ; but my head was in such a confused

state that I am not quite clear as to the exact words; I believe the taller of the two was cursing the other for striking me."

"Did you meet any one after you quitted my house with the money, and before you were robbed?"

"Not a soul, except Master Winks' jack-ass."

"And you came direct from John Burnet's to Longinore?"

"I did."

"Who did you see by the way?"

"Why, many folks were coming and going like."

"Did you speak to any one?"

"Well, Sir Richard, seeing that I am pretty well known to almost everybody hereabouts, I dare say I might."

"But had you any particular conversation with any one?"

"Why, as to that, I'm a straightforward man, and perhaps am not particular enough."

"I must remind you, Goodman, you are

upon your oath and the truth must be spoken.
Did you stop to speak to any one?"

"I cannot say but I did, Sir Richard."

"And who was it you spoke to?"

"Blanche Stewart; I cannot deny it."

The little prig of a magistrate, with a very knowing look, exchanged glances with his clerk.

"And whereabouts did you meet with the girl?"

"At the road post—and we walked to the middle wood stile together."

"Was she alone?"

"Why, Sir Richard, how could she be when I was with her?"

"I ask you, Master Goodman, was she alone when you first met her?"

"When I went up to her she was alone."

"Did you see any one besides Blanche Stewart at that time?"

"Why, there was a sort of a kind of man ran off like a rabbit to its burrow."

"Do you know who that man was?"

"One cannot tell a rabbit by its tail."

"I ask you again, have you any notion who the man was that left Blanche Stewart, just as you came up? It is no use trying to blink the question, Master Goodman, for you see I am in possession of information upon the matter. I am not one of those persons to be bamboozled or put off the scent by a side wind. I may as well tell you at once, that I have evidence that the girl was seen walking towards the road-post with a man—or, at any rate, an individual—therefore your unaccountable desire, or rather design to screen that individual or person, will prove of no avail."

"I have not the slightest wish to screen him," said the old man testily.

"Then, I ask, do you know the name of the person you saw?"

"I told you, Sir Richard, he ran off before I could well see him, but to the best of my belief it was—none of the lads of the village," he said, changing his intention, as he caught

the eye of old Burnet intently fixed upon him. "I cannot say for certain who it was, and I should not like to cast suspicion on an innocent person."

"Was he one of the men who afterwards robbed and ill-treated you?"

"To the best of my belief he was not."

"You say you walked to the middle wood stile with this young woman. Tell me what was the nature of your conversation with her?"

"Cautioning her against walking so late in the evening; telling her that young girls like herself should be careful of their reputation—and so on."

"Did you mention the man to her?"

"Yes, certainly—one of 'em."

"One of them—which?"

"One of the dangers."

"Did this girl know that you were going to Longmore?"

"To be sure she did, and so might all the

world for what I cared. I am not ashamed of where I go—no, nor what I do, for the matter of that."

"Did you tell her where you were going, or did the girl ask you?"

"Why, really, to say the truth, I—I believe she asked me," said the old man evasively.

"And I suppose you told her?"

"Of course I did."

"Now, Master Goodman, attend particularly to this question :—Did she know for what purpose you were going to Longmore?"

"Why, of course she did, for I told her myself; she did not ask me why I was going to Longmore."

"What induced you to be so communicative on such a subject?"

"Why, Sir Richard, I had occasion to mention my old friend, Master Burnet, and you know he was the cause of my going."

"Did Blanche Stewart ask you which way you should return from Longmore?"

Goodman did not reply.

"Come, Goodman, answer my question.
Did she know which way you would return?"

"I can't say but she did."

"Then she asked you?"

"Yes."

"And you told her?"

"I did."

"Can you remember what you told her?"

"I believe I told her I should go by the
mill and the alder plantation."

"And it was close to the plantation you
were attacked?"

"Yes, it was."

"Don't you think it was an unwise thing
to trust such an important secret to such a
girl's keeping? I am surprised that a man
of your years should have answered the
questions of an artful girl like—"

"Artful! Sir Richard? I have known
Blanche from her infancy—have nursed her
on my knee a hundred times—aye, and
watched her like one of my own lambs—and

if Blanche Stewart have a false face or a false heart, then there's no truth under heaven," and the old man sighed heavily.

"Well, Master Goodman, I am astonished that such a candid, open, truthful, upright person," said Sir Richard, with a sneer, "should not have told you the name of the person with whom she had been conversing."

The old man rubbed his head, and wriggled about uncomfortably.

"I am not surprised, however," continued Sir Richard, "that you should endeavour to shield or excuse this girl, who I have no doubt has been in the habit of imposing upon your credulity and good nature."

The man's face turned red and white as he interrupted Sir Richard, saying:

"Blanche—"

"Don't interrupt me. The case is as clear as the sun at noon-day; it cannot admit of a doubt. I shall be compelled to consider her as an accomplice before the fact, and she must go—"

" You cannot think of sending the poor child to jail!" interrupted Goodman.

" Look at the case, Master Goodman. Is there not clear evidence that the girl was seen walking with a person unknown, to the end of the lane, and there found by yourself, and that this unknown person is also seen lurking about the lanes and plantations with two others who answer exactly to the description of the robbers. Then there is your own evidence, that you met the girl on your way to Longmore; that you saw her in company with a man, who, the moment you came near, ran away and concealed himself. Moreover, that she was perfectly aware of the object of your visit to my house—namely, to borrow money—and that she made minute enquiry as to which way you would return. I ask you, Master Goodman, what does all this amount to? Why, to the most positive, presumptive evidence."

The old man rubbed his head more vehemently than before.

“Now, Goodman, I may as well tell you that I have had some insight into the character of this girl from my worthy friend, Lady Esther Vince, and so far from being the artless, innocent, pure-minded person you would have me believe; there is not a more designing, artful, forward, pettish girl in the whole neighbourhood; according to Lady Esther she is the plague of her whole household, and up to every species of trickery and wickedness.”

“Now plague on Lady Esther for her uncharitableness!” cried the farmer, indignantly.

“Master Goodman,” interrupted Sir Richard, “you forget yourself! recollect that you are speaking of my esteemed friend in terms most disrespectful; and as to her want of charity, I am certain there is no woman in the whole county, be she high or low, rich or poor, more charitable than Lady Esther Vince.”

“I am sorry, Sir Richard, if I have forgotten myself, or spoken in any way dis-

respectful of an honourable lady who is your friend, and more especially if I have said anything that may be hurtful to the feelings of my kind landlord, Sir Richard Jenkins; but I cannot help thinking that Lady Esther has not acted the part of a kind mistress, and, what is more, of a good Christian, to have made the worst of a silly, playful child's idle frolics. I remember I was once young myself, and I'll be bound to say, so were you, Sir Richard; and I have no doubt we can both of us recall the time when some trifling tom-fooleries were the delight of our hearts. For myself, I may with truth affirm there is nothing on earth gives me so much pleasure as witnessing the gambols and frolics of the young people around me, even when I am myself the subject of their jest and merriment; and for Blanche Stewart, in particular, I know her to be as full of mischief as she is free of malice—as light and joyous as a squirrel. I would ask you, Sir Richard, if such a person is likely to be the

accomplice of thieves, or the hatchet of a deep laid plan of robbery and violence?"

"In truth," replied Sir Richard, after a pause, "I must confess there is much truth in your observations, and I will discharge her at once if she will enlighten us as to who the man was with whom you saw her, but this she obstinately refuses. Do you hear, young woman, if you will tell us the name of your accomplice or associate I will let you go free."

Blanche spoke not, she merely shook her head.

"Come, Blanche, this is sheer obstinacy," said Goodman, "which will bring you into trouble, and you'll break the heart of your poor old grandmother."

Blanche remained perfectly silent, though it was evident from the convulsive twitchings and movements of her fragile frame that she was deeply affected.

"You make me wish that my old tongue was dumb, or that the lads had hit a little

harder, and cut me off from this day's scene of sorrow. Oh, my God! only to think of my turning informer, and against my darling Blanche too!"

The sobs of the girl became violent, and the tears streamed from her eyes, but not a word would she utter.

"Will you tell me one thing, my child."

Like a flash of lightning her eyes turned upon her old friend.

"Was I right in my guess of the young fellow's name?"

"I will betray no man," she exclaimed, half choked with sobs.

"Master Goodman," said Sir Richard, "you say that the man who was discovered by you in company with this wilful girl was not one of the robbers."

"To the best of my belief he was not, Sir Richard."

"Humph! Now attend to me, young woman, have you any suspicion, or do you think

that the young man you were in company with had any hand in this robbery?"

"He!" exclaimed Blanche, with a look and vehemence that made those around her start. "He would not hurt a hair of Master Goodman's head for the wealth of the whole world."

"Then Master Goodman is well known to him," Sir Richard said significantly.

Blanche instantly perceived her error, and remained silent.

"Did he ever mention the names of his companions to you?" asked Sir Richard.

Blanche raised her head, but spoke not.

"Bethink yourself," went on the magistrate, "I am unwilling to say or do anything harsh, or that may seem severe or rigorous, but if—"

"He never told me of but one of his companions," interrupted Blanche.

"Ah, now you're acting wisely—let me hear—let me hear. What was his name?"

"It was one William Shakspeare, sir."

“ William what !”

“ William Shakspeare, who he told me had led him astray.”

“ What in the name of patience is the girl driving at ?”

“ I am telling the simple truth, Sir Richard ; he told me that William Shakspeare had been a deer stealer in Warwickshire.”

“ Who had been a deer stealer, child ?”

“ Why, Will Shakspeare, as he called his companion.”

“ The girl’s as mad as a March hare. You don’t mean to make game of me do you, you impudent hussy. Tell me instantly what do you mean by William Shakspeare.”

“ I’ll not say another word,” cried Blanche, her girlish petulance gaining the mastery over the terrors of her situation. “ I am first blamed for silence, and then chidden for speaking. I shall hold my tongue.”

“ Then I shall know how to act with you, Mistress Malapert,” said Sir Richard, assuming an air of dignity and important severity,

which, however, immediately quailed beneath the gaze of a man who at that moment entered the apartment.

This person was enveloped in a dark-colored cloak from head to foot, whilst a drooping feather of sable hue cast a deep shade over his features, and gave a portentous gloom to a most sinister looking countenance. He walked slowly and with heavy step towards the table, behind which Sir Richard was seated, and there was something half ironical in the meek way in which he addressed the magistrate, requesting he might be permitted to speak a few words to him in private.

The Magistrate made no reply, but rising from his chair pushed open a door and beckoned the stranger to follow him into an inner chamber. When they had entered the room Sir Richard carefully secured the door, then hastily demanded :

“ What in the name of Heaven can have brought *you* here ? ”

"My innate love of equity, Sir Richard, and the desire that *law* should not, in this solitary instance, prevail over justice."

"You surely cannot intend to interfere with my duty as a magistrate; this passes all patience and discretion."

"Hark ye, Sir Richard, that poor child is as innocent of this robbery as either you or myself."

"Perhaps, it may be, more so than one of us," retorted Sir Richard, with strong and bitter emphasis.

"Not more so, my good friend, if you allude to me; my hands are as clean as your own in this affair, therefore if your fears are on my account they are utterly misplaced."

"Your irony is misplaced, Lawton; it is not meet that honest men's lives should be jeopardised by common cut-purses."

"I understand you, Sir Richard, and I assure you that your neck is in no more danger than that of the toughest goose in your farm-yard, whose age protects him!"

" You do not mean to insult me, Master Lawton ; if you do—"

" Quite impossible, Sir Richard."

" Then be quick and explain the motive for your being here, as I cannot stay longer parleying with you ; my duty requires me to decide the case I am engaged upon."

" What haste, Sir Richard. The case is decided already—the girl is innocent, and you must set her at liberty."

" But I cannot stop the course of justice, my character as a magistrate is at stake."

" Well, if your influence is so trifling as not to be able to overthrow the idle curiosity of a parcel of ignorant clodpoles, I—"

" I said no such thing, Master Lawton," interrupted Sir Richard, whose dignity seemed hurt ; " my authority and influence in this neighbourhood is— But 'tis no use talking to you on these points, let me know at once what is your object in coming here, and if I can assist you, and your request is reasonable, I will do my best to grant it."

" Reasonable or not, Sir Richard, I ask you at once to grant it; perhaps it is better to be a little unreasonable that there may be no loss of valuable time in consideration."

" Humph! you are a most absolute dictator, Lawton," said Sir Richard.

" And you an inflexible, upright magistrate, Sir Richard ; but let us not waste more time in useless talk ; that girl is innocent and must be set at liberty."

" As you are so well aware of her innocence, the guilty person must be known to you, and will be given up to justice."

" You are both right and wrong, most potent, grave, and reverend Solon ; right as regards my knowledge, but wrong as regards my will. I do know the guilty party, but he is protected by the mystic circle which binds me as well as yourself. Treason is a stain deep enough methinks to hide those of common crimes."

" Then it is one of the faction?"

"None other than your notable friend Frank Middleton."

"Friend! No friend of mine. I marvel that you call such a man my friend."

"Under the commonwealth of crime, Sir Richard, rank loses its respect, and honor its observance. I wonder you have not yet found the democratic influence of mutual iniquity."

"You speak as if I were a great criminal, Master Lawton, not as if in league only for the good of my country and for the liberty of conscience."

"Very true, Sir Richard, only once let in the sunshine of success, and we shall be seen in the true light of patriots and heroes; but in the mean time we must be content to bear the names of traitors and such like disagreeable titles. It is not so much what a man is, as what he seems in this world; and so you see, Sir Richard, there are two sides to all pictures, your hero and warrior on one side,

and what men call robber and cut-throat on the other; your statesman and patriot in the court is a double-faced knave in the camp; your Frenchman of honour would meet with a halter, your Highland chief is little better than a Lowland thief, and your Catholic saint not much better than a Protestant scoundrel."

"But there are men and things which men in all ranks, degrees, classes, and communities agree in abhoring, viz., highwaymen, and highway robbery with violence."

"True, my worthy friend, most true; but whilst we are walking under the shadow of night one cannot always see to choose the weapon we are obliged to use. In a word, Sir Richard, let us but once emerge from obscurity and we cast off all the contemptible associates whom we are obliged at present to countenance."

"But this open violence—this atrocious deed—"

"Must be hushed up; and, as Frank Middleton has got the money, he must even

keep it. It were worse than madness on our parts to go on with the investigation."

The stranger then commenced a narrative of events and details, which it is unnecessary at this time to follow. Enough has been related to show that Sir Richard and his unexpected visitor were mixed up in some secret bond of communion in which the culprits of the preceding night were also involved. The result was that Sir Richard found himself in a position which has been occupied by many a wiser man, mingled in the consequences of crimes which he abhorred and of which he was guiltless, and, moreover, surrounded by perils over the conduct of which he had not the slightest control. With a restless disposition, and a meddling temper, he had been almost, without knowing it, led into a secret combination, and now found himself more deeply involved than he either imagined or desired. The result of the previous conversation was a message to Goodman requiring his attendance in the pri-

vate chamber, to whom Sir Richard made some awkward and ineffectual explanations, which the shrewd old man saw at once were mere evasions; but as the upright judge ended by expressing his entire conviction of the innocence of Blanche Stewart, Goodman was too much rejoiced to make any further enquiry.

With a lightened heart, he lost not a single minute in returning to the room in which the enquiry had been conducted, and, with all the vivacity of a younger man, informed the trembling prisoner of her discharge, and the conviction on the mind of Sir Richard of her perfect innocence. Blanche was, for a moment, overpowered by her emotions, but relief came to her in a violent burst of tears as she ran towards Goodman and threw her arms round his neck, and the winter of age and the spring of youth were united in a fond embrace.

This sudden and unexpected termination to the examination, however agreeable to the

feelings of Goodman and the young girl, was far from satisfactory to the rest of the persons who had gathered together, and who, though they all liked Blanche, and would gladly have shielded her from punishment, were grievously disappointed at the summary manner in which the case had been dismissed after the great excitement created; and when Goodman left the justice room with the beautiful and afflicted girl, murmurs of discontent arose, observations, not very complimentary to Sir Richard and justice's justice, were made, and great annoyance was exhibited.

Lady Esther Vince, who had been made acquainted with all the particulars of the morning's examination, with her usual want of christian charity, had ordered her doors to be closed against the poor girl, who, although discharged by Sir Richard Jenkins as innocent, she could not acquit; for she declared the impudent hussy, if not a thief herself, was associated with a man whose

character would not bear the light of day; and what was quite as disgraceful she had been absent from The Rookery all night. This, in the eyes of the prim, starched, formal old maid, was quite equal to highway robbery, if not worse; and so the poor heart-broken girl was compelled to seek a shelter in the cottage of her bed-ridden grandmother, whom she had hitherto supported out of her small earnings.

Poverty and disgrace became the portion of the hitherto merry and light-hearted Blanche, and she was one of those not the best fitted to struggle against such trials, for she was somewhat self-willed and irritable, though possessed of that kindness and tenderness of heart which is not incompatible with the qualities alluded to. She was one of the most generous of beings, and she felt her situation bitterly. On the Sabbath morning, as was her wont, she repaired to church, and here again she had the mortification of seeing those with whom she had been associated shrink from her—those

who had come ostensibly to confess that they were guilty, miserable sinners. Alas! how many who know and acknowledge their manifold sins and wickedness in the sight of their Creator, and who, too, are sincere in their acknowledgments, turn round and judge their fellow creatures, as if they themselves were absolutely pure and guiltless; and if the really sincere and pious unhappily do this, with what utter triumph, with what despicable self-gratification, do the formalist and the hypocrite condemn the erring and the unhappy?

Borne to the earth, as it were, by the pressure of affliction, the poor old woman, Blanche's grandmother, became utterly helpless. The grief of her darling child, over whom she had wept and prayed, from her earliest infancy to this time, gave a severe shock to her constitution; she had watched her from the tender babe to the bright laughing girl; had seen her growing up in beauty and cheerfulness a light and sylph-like maiden, joyous as the

day was long ; and it was come to this. The poor old woman did not for a moment believe her grand-child guilty ; she had the utmost confidence in her innocence ; but she saw that she was suffering, from the suspicion of those around her, many of the consequences of crime. She was neglected, nay, utterly abandoned by her former associates, none of whom came to enquire after the poor mourner or her bed-ridden relative.

A fortnight elapsed, and the robbery had become an old story ; ordinary topics took their ordinary places, at the ale-house, the smithy, the barber's, and the church-yard ; these being the general gossip-shops of the country village. The strange faces that men remembered to have seen anterior to this event had disappeared, and things ran on in their ordinary channel, that is, the villagers heeded the affairs of their neighbours and attended not to their own, and still fewer to the loveliness of nature, which was now

beaming with all the freshness and beauty of early spring. April waned away, and the last evening of that month of promise saw Goodman again on his way to Oakfield Hall.

CHAPTER VII.

OAKFIELD HALL was a large, heavy, brick building, with mullioned windows and huge buttresses between each of them ; the whole extent of the ground floor, upon one side of the house, was occupied by a hall of ample dimensions, but which at present contained nothing more than a few hurdles and sundry articles of lumber as it is usually termed—a species of furniture of unknown value and very equivocal utility. The windows of this spacious apartment, composed of an infinity of small, diamond-shaped panes, were for the most part broken, the glass lying beneath

amongst the pebbles and long rank grass, and tinkling with every drop which fell from the overhanging eaves. Over this hall the windows of several apartments opened, forming part of the sleeping chambers of the family, but the principal rooms still occupied were on the other side of the building.

The only portion of Oakfield Hall really in a ruinous state was a small chapel standing at an angle with the house, supposed to be of much earlier date than the Hall, and certainly of very superior architecture. It was of stone (the house as before said being built of brick), and what remained of its pinnacles, mullions, and arches was elaborately carved, but the roof had fallen in: the tracery of one window only being entire, whilst the tombs of saints and priors long exposed to the influence of the atmosphere, were choked with moss, and grass, and nettles. There was a peculiar character, half sacred, half secular, about the place; but Time had mellowed and blended all that was incongruous. A free-

stone escutcheon, with all the proud devices of the fierce Howards, was mouldering over the door of the hall, and a mutilated cross, the more peaceful cognizance of their predecessors, fell piecemeal from the pinnacles of the chapel.

Avoiding the principal entrance, which consisted of a massive double door, but which had long been disused and fastened up, Goodman made a circuit of the building to that side upon which the tenanted apartments were situated. Here the buttresses were clothed with ivy, and great care had been taken to train clematis, jessamine, and other creeping plants round the windows; still, the same mixture of secular and sacred things struck the eye, and moreover it was evident that the spoils of past ages had been put in requisition to furnish the necessities of the present. The door-stone had originally figured as St. Michael, whose hands clasped upon his breast, in a posture of supplication, were but lately worn down by the feet of the inmates,

whilst a recreant St. George formed a foot-bridge over the little rivulet.

Goodman having briefly paid his respects to old Burnet and his wife, made his way to the apartment of his god-daughter. A small chamber with a single window which formed a considerable recess, was the room appropriated to the use of Susan Burnet, which she was accustomed to call her own ; into this sanctum few were admitted, but Goodman was a privileged person.

Susan Burnet was one of that class of beauties whose charms impress rather than command ; hers was that gentle, placid, peaceful style of loveliness which engages, but does not arrest the attention. She was fair even to paleness, but it was not the paleness of ill health—it was a delicate, marble-like complexion, which the least emotion would suffuse with crimson. Hers was the full black eye, upon whose liquid light the pen of the poet has so often enlarged—hers the long silken lashes and dark pencilled brows on which the

tongue of youth has so often rhapsodized. The expression of her eyes had more of meekness than vivacity ; the lids hung low upon them, and gave a downcast character to her whole face. Her hair was sable as the raven's wing, and hung in long tresses on her snowy neck, whilst her full red lips and exquisitely moulded mouth and chin might have formed the model for a sculptor--such was Susan Burnet in person. Nor was that person inconsistent with her character. Placid in all things, there was yet a deep stream of feeling in her disposition, which flowed strongly beneath the surface of her very calm and gentle demeanour ; a high tone of sentiment, a refined taste, were by no means in accordance with her station or the society to which she was accustomed. Her firm, slow, majestic step would have become the daughter of some proud, feudal baron, her clear, high forehead would have added beauty to the tiara of a countess.

When there is disparity between character

and situation—when persons are born, as it were, above their station—we seldom witness much happiness, but this was not the case with Susan Burnet; her pleasures and pursuits had little to do with her station in life; she was fond of solitude, therefore the society with which she must have mixed, she cheerfully resigned, and lived happily, because peacefully; deriving that happiness from the charms of Nature and the cultivation of those accomplishments which it had been her father's pride to procure for her. If any exception might be made to her very amiable disposition, it was in the fact of a little too much precision of manner, a trifling set-off to her sterling excellence; some of her father's stern, unbending pride and rectitude might be reflected in his lovely child; accustomed to the exercise of rigid self-control, there might be something like severity in Susan's estimate of those whose passions were less rigorously ruled than her own.

"Susan, my love," said old Goodman as

he entered her room, "I have a favor to ask of you, and I'll barter fair for a piece of news which will come home to your heart."

"It must be something better than the last news you brought, and of a certainty more interesting. Master Winks had had all his early cabbage cropt off by a sow, and Master Jinks had had his early beans cut off by a frost."

"Tut, tut, child; this is something better than village gossip."

"Then I suppose it is about the king and the court, and all the grand folks in London. Or of another batch of bishops having been sent to the Tower."

"Not a whit nearer, not a whit nearer the mark. King, court, and bishops, are nothing to the intelligence I bring; but as I said before, I will bargain fair with you, if you will promise to do me the favor I ask, then I will tell you the news."

"I care very little for the news, Master Goodman, but I may safely promise to do

what you ask, for I know you will not require anything from me but what I can, may, and ought to do."

"That's a brave, dear girl. Now, I'll tell you my news. Your brother has returned to the village!"

"Returned!" exclaimed Susan, turning pale; "will he not run great risks for that affair—I mean the robbery?"

"Not he; power has put justice in his pocket; and the truth of the robbery must not be known. Sir Richard will not see, and no man presumes to know better than the lord of the manor. That matter puzzles my brain—but I can be blind and dumb, as well as my neighbours."

"And what will James do? My father protests he shall never enter his doors again," cried Susan in alarm.

"Your father's a silly old man for his pains, and knows not his own heart half as well as I do. Let James Burnet only come to the door and whine a few words through

the key-hole, and his voice will draw bolt and bar, just as the warm air of spring thaws the ice upon the fish pond, and a few tears will not only open the door, but the father's arms into the bargain—the silly old man."

"Oh, but Master Goodman, he is so resolute this time; he has talked of nothing else for the last fortnight, but that he means to forget he ever had a son."

"Truly, truly, girl, the best way to remember to forget, certainly—just like a man who tells his neighbours he is going to commit suicide, and never does it."

"But, dear friend, what can have induced my wilful brother to return to Thorpeton, where he is so well-known, and in such evil repute?" asked Susan, tremblingly.

"Oh, as for that, many things may have brought him back; perhaps, and what is most likely, he has spent all his money, and comes to seek a fresh supply."

"Then he will be disappointed, I am sure, for only three days ago I heard my father say

that he has been obliged to borrow money, and mortgage some of his land, and all to supply James's extravagance."

"More's the pity, more's the pity; I would have let the lad starve rather than have done so; but all the world's alike—the wisest of us can do very foolish things sometimes, and my old friend's weak side was, still is, his children—plague on ye."

"Well, but, Master Goodman, do you really think that my brother is come back for money?"

"Humph! I don't know—and I don't much care. A bad son is like a bad shilling, it passes quickly enough from hand to hand, but is sure to come back to the rightful owner at last. Perhaps Blanche Stewart is at the bottom of it!"

"Surely, you do not think that wicked creature can have brought him back!" exclaimed Susan, with flushing face.

"Aye, there it is—there it is; ye are all alike; ye're just as bad as the rest, Susan

Burnet; man and woman, mother and daughter, all cry out against that poor child. I have not spoken to a woman for the last week, but it's 'Who'd have thought of Blanche Stewart! Only think of Blanche Stewart!' and ye all call her a 'creature,' as though we were'nt all creatures; but none of ye think to say poor creature. Why, as to that robbery, she's as innocent as the babe unborn," cried Goodman, indignantly.

"But her stopping out all night—her meeting one of the robbers—what would you say of me, Master Goodman, if I were to stop out all night?"

"That you acted very unlike Susan Burnet; it would be more like her to pity the unfortunate, and to have more charity in her speech towards a fellow creature."

"I do pity her—but whilst I pity I cannot but condemn."

"Ah, my girl, there's a sort of pity, a very near relation to pride—a marvellously fine, lady-like sort of pity—that sits beside the

fire and wishes, but works not! Humph! your honest, hard-working pity is the one for my money," said the old man, almost sternly.

" You have never had to charge me with want of sympathy in the troubles and distresses of my fellow creatures, nor inactivity, either, as far as my means and opportunities extended; and if I could be of any service—"

" You can—if it be of any service to soothe a broken heart," said Goodman, passionately.

" But consider, Master Goodman, my credit and my character—"

" Can never be injured by kindness and charity," interrupted the plain-spoken old man. " In truth, Susan, the favor you promised me was on the part of Blanche Stewart."

" I only promised because I thought you were as careful of my credit, and honor, and happiness, as I could be myself; and what do you wish me to do in regard to Blanche Stewart?"

"It is, in short, that you would go with me to see her, my dear child."

"To see Blanche Stewart! You surely are not in earnest, Master Goodman. She was never one of my companions in her happy days, and—"

"Unhappiness," interrupted her godfather, "is the best introduction in the world, my dear Susan."

"But—"

"But—nonsense, child! I know all you would say, and have answered all your objections as I came along, so there's no need of any more argument. I know that you are a good girl, and that you have never swerved from the path of duty; but I also know that I have lived upwards of three-score years in this world, and I have yet to learn that any one walked less steadily in the straight course because he stretched out a hand to help those who had strayed out of it. Come, Susan, I know that you women-folk think much and hardly of these matters—and it is quite right.

virtue should hold nothing in common with vice—but there's much odds betwixt holding fellowship with a man, and helping him out of the mire, and so you need not be a companion, but a comforter to poor Blanche. And think what a comfort it will be to her to see a pitying face. Put yourself in the poor girl's place (as Heaven forbid you ever should be) and then fancy what it would be to see one of your own sex and age, when all the rest of the world shunned, and despised, and deserted you ; and, oh ! if you cannot pity poor Blanche, think of her grandmother, her poor bed-ridden grandmother, whose deepest misery it is to see her beloved child despised and neglected !”

“ But what will the neighbours say ? ” asked Susan.

“ Hang the neighbours ! what does it matter what they say ! they will be sure to let their evil tongues run, whether you go or not. Your own conscience is your best safeguard against gossipping villagers, and if you

satisfy that, what need you care about your neighbours!"

"I will go," she replied firmly, "and be assured my reluctance did not proceed from any want of kind feeling or sympathy."

"That I'll be sworn it did not, my love, for you are a *right-minded woman!* So get on your walking gear, and we'll be there in no time."

"Why, you do not intend going to-night!" said Susan.

"To be sure I do; you would not keep the poor lass a dozen hours or more in distress, when a single word from your kind lips may help to comfort her."

"But it will be dark," urged Susan.

"And what of that, darling; darkness will do us no harm as long as our deeds are not dark—and that's the worst darkness. Now I think of it, the moon will be quite risen, for although its light is feeble at present, it will be shining brightly anon in the dark skies, like a good deed in this wicked world.

Come, Susan, we'll go down the meadows through the wood, and avoid the village; so if there is aught shameful in the matter, they who would think so will be none the wiser."

With that the maiden assumed her walking attire. Old Goodman, from habit, took off his beaver and smoothed it round with the sleeve of his grey coat; whisked the dust from his shoes with his blue checked hand-kerchief, and they set out upon their charitable errand.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN an early chapter we gave our readers a glimpse of the exterior of the "Royal Oak;" we will now introduce them to the interior of that remarkable old ale-house.

In a small, low-roofed room, across the ceiling of which extended a large beam, giving a tall man an opportunity of breaking his head if he were not careful to stoop, sat James Burnet. The neglected flame of a small lamp, barely sufficient to illumine the room, displayed a scene of great discom-fort, admirably adapted to make a sad and solitary man feel more sad and solitary still. The table showed the stains of liquor—

the impression of flaggons and bottoms of horns were upon it—which bore evidence of a recent revel. A few daubs of pictures hung against the walls, and the seats were of all sorts and sizes, from the old-fashioned high-backed elbow chair, with its carved back and leathern seat, and brass nails, to the humble three-legged stool. Burnet sat in a painful reverie, his head buried in his hands, and his elbows on the table; and to judge from the deep dejection of his countenance, was painful evidently revolving affairs of sorrowful interest.

His reverie was interrupted by the entrance of the landlord.

“A gentleman wishes to speak to you, Master Burnet.”

“The devil take both you and the gentleman,” angrily returned James Burnet; “did I not tell you to keep my presence here a secret? What sort of gentleman can want me? Gentlemen of the staff—tipstaffs, and constables? Gentlemen of the sword—bul-

lies and braggarts ? Gentlemen of the dice—gamblers and cheats ? Or, gentlemen of the tankard—drunkards and profligates ? There's a goodly list, Master Boniface; a notable company, truly, for which it is worth while to give up name and fame, and hopes and prospects, home and friends, all that can make life valuable. Heigho ! 'tis well to taste the husks that the swine eat. Well, who is it ? ”

“ A friend of yours, Master James.”

“ Friend ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ” laughed the youth; “ there is no such word in my vocabulary ; pray, has this friend any horns ? 'tis an outlandish beast I should think, for I never saw one. Yet I lie like a villain, I have had hundreds. Friends ! friends ! at times they are like a swarm of flies that buzz and flutter about you so long as the sun of prosperity shines, but no sooner is the sky overcast than off they fly to their holes, lest the storm should wet their wings. Marry, then, I have had friends in abundance, who, while they forced

me to laugh, picked my pockets ; aye," he continued, fiercely, "and these friends smile in the face while they stab to the heart—curses on such friends, I will have none of them. If they persist in invading my den, I will show them that I have teeth that can and will bite."

"Den!" shouted the landlord; "are you not ashamed to call the best room in the 'Royal Oak' a den? Is it not furnished with the best chairs and stools, and a table that's polished so that you may see your face in it, and pictures of holy men and women, and holy places, and a likeness of king Cole, who, as the song says, 'was a jolly old soul,' and a sampler of my daughter's own needle-work—it's beautiful! you see—'A.D.'—that's Ann did it, 1686."

"Pshaw! I care not about the room or what's in it; but as long as I stay in it I will not suffer any one to intrude upon my privacy."

"Nor shall anyone; though it's somewhat

inconvenient to me, for to-morrow, you know, will be May-day, and the house is choke full, and the company are desirous for more room—the parlour's full, the kitchen's full, the bar's full ; and then, Master James, you and your friends have been drinking, and you have had the best to eat, and have slept upon the softest of beds ; and for the last two days I have not had a chance of seeing the colour of your money ; and though I would do anything to serve you, for your father's sake, we publicans can't live upon air. And now that I have opened my mouth, I will just tell you a little bit of mind, that may be useful to you in the future—that is, be less free of your favours and more chary of your cash. There be many idle fellows come here, and you call for the best without even thinking of the cost ; and you treat them as wouldn't hold out a hand to save you from drowning, nor give a groat to keep you from being hanged.”

“ Hold ! I am too much out of humour with fortune to receive reproof just now, so

you may keep your advice till it is asked for. Now, as to this *friend* of mine."

"He will speak for himself," said Frank Middleton, entering the apartment; "but not with dry lips. Come, Bully Boniface, what canst give a thirsty gentleman? I'll have none of your ale, although it be a good beverage of its kind; it's too heavy and sleepy for my digestive organs. So wake up, my man, and see if you haven't in some odd corner, somewhat of a more generous juice?"

The landlord put his finger to his nose and gave a most significant nod.

"You are right there; no doubt I have something better than ale in my cellar, for you see, my grandfather, who was the first of my name who kept open house, was a man well to do in the world, and his customers lay much among the gay guests who came down to this neighbourhood, stirring the country for King Charles (I mean Charles the First of blessed memory), and many of the ranting, roystering cavaliers used the inn, and many

was the jolly carouse they had, enough to tumble the old house to the ground ; and you may be sure they were the right sort of lads to know the right stuff ; and I've kept up the honor of the ' Royal Oak ' in that respect."

" Cleverly said, my merry host."

" But then you must know, sir, the wine is old and scarce, for the bins have dwindled slowly, and now none but the best customers drink it, and they always—"

" Pay for it, is not that what you would insinuate ? Now, to ease your mind on that matter, for what you say is nothing but fair, see here," and Middleton pulled out a well filled purse.

" Enough, sir," said the landlord, with glistening eyes, " you shall crack a bottle of the best ; and ye'll not take it amiss that I ask for the money first; for the last time I saw that purse it was so light that you would have had some difficulty in throwing it over the signboard outside."

A quick glance of scrutiny was turned by Frank upon the broad open countenance of mine host, which caused a slight confusion in his manner, as he said :

“ We London gentlemen have means of replenishing our purses that you country clod-poles know nothing about. But come, the wine ! the wine ! let’s have the wine.”

“ Well, what say you to a magnum of Burgundy, with cobwebs on the bottle as thick as—”

“ Your head, Boniface ! Ah ! by St. Anthony, who was a better judge of women than wine, let’s have the Burgundy. By Jove ! we’ve found a well in the desert; fetch the Burgundy by all means ”

“ And the shiners—”

“ Oh, take that and be gone,” said Frank, throwing a gold coin on the table, which the landlord seized, saying, “ Ah, ha ! the Burgundy lads ! ” and he left the room.

“ Come, Burnet, cast away your gloomy looks,” cried Frank, as soon as the door had

closed ; " what's the use of sorrowing ? it never cured a sword thrust, nor improved a bad deed ; and what's the good of sorrowing for the past, which is as though it had never been ? "

" Your sophistry, Frank, will not cheer me ; it is difficult for a man to soothe the anguish of a broken spirit. You can neither enter into my feelings nor understand my sorrow, though, in truth, you have been in some measure the cause of it. Why haunt me like a shadow ? I shall be tempted one of these days to rid myself of you by fair means or foul."

" You will not betray me, Burnet ? "

" I have told you I will not, and you know my pledged word is sacred ; but I want not your company ; upon that fatal night of the robbery I determined to get rid of you. Nay, even before that. In the name of Heaven, Frank, why could you not keep yourself from open violence ? "

" I have described to you my temptation,

James, and I have confessed my sorrow. Zounds, man ! one cannot do more than repent of a fault, and if I am a ruffianly blade, you are quite as much to blame for it as myself."

" It is true, Frank, we have kept each other in countenance, in riot and revelry ; and I am, therefore, the more disposed to bear with you ; but I will not—I will not. Let me once see the end of these troubles—teach me how to place poor Blanche out of the reach of disgrace and misery—I will then carry a stout arm and a bright sword to the wars, and make myself a name that shall atone for the follies and faults—aye, and vices—of the past, or hide myself in an obscure grave, where I shall be a disgrace or dishonor to no one."

" These are wild words, James, and sound to me like madness."

" Madness !" exclaimed Burnet, " and have I not ample cause for madness. I have disgraced myself as well as bringing disgrace upon all who are near and dear to me. My poor dear father, with his strict notions of

purity, Heaven bless him ! to be pointed at and traduced as the father of a villain ! My kind, good mother, too, so passive, so amiable; and my sweet sister Susan ; and poor, poor, Blanche Stewart ! are not these all causes for madness ? But no, Frank, I am not mad ; it were well for me if I were, and that I could forget myself and all my follies."

"Here comes a measure of madness then," said Frank, as the landlord entered the room with a bottle of wine, "by which you may drown sorrow and drive away dull care ; this is the true Lethe in which vice, folly, and care, may be washed out of the mind."

"There, my masters," cried the host, "there is a bottle of the best."

It was a large bottle, called a magnum, and from the cobwebs which clung round it, as well as some other signs by which the initiated discover the same, had evidently been an old housekeeper. The landlord drew the cork, went to a corner cupboard, and produced therefrom a couple of long bell

glasses, one of which he held up to the light and examined as though he thought it was cracked, then took out another, and by this ingenious manœuvre got three upon the table; but Frank Middleton, who did not, perhaps *would* not, take the hint, filled but two.

“There, my masters,” said the landlord, “was I not right when I told you the wine was first-rate; is it not superlative juice? see how it clings round the brim; and then the motes, if ye hold it up to the light, ye may see them dancing like specks of gold.”

“And you have been paid for it,” replied Frank.

“Many thanks, sir, many thanks; but it was not altogether the price of the wine I was thinking of; if a gentleman that is a gentleman, has not wherewithal to pay on the instant, I know my duty better than to press him for the same; but, in truth, I waited to see if the wine suited your tastes, gentlemen.”

Boniface did not leave the room, being anxious to get a taste of the wine, but set about putting the table into a proper angle with the sides of the room, put each seat into its proper place, jingled the glasses in the corner cupboard, till Frank Middleton, whose patience became fairly exhausted, filled a bumper of wine, muttering some inarticulate words about having forgotten it before ; and Boniface, with innumerable thanks, drank off the portion, smacked his lips with a peculiar relish, and left the room.

There was a silence of some minutes' duration, which neither James nor his companion felt disposed to break. To the latter this silence was not merely embarrassing, but positively painful ; he gazed from the floor to the ceiling, from the table to the corner cupboard, then sipped his wine stretched out first one leg and then the other, turned his gaze upon his companion, and hummed a few notes of a popular melody, and again relapsed into silence—in

fact, he got into what is called a fit of the fidgets. Meanwhile, Burnet leant his head upon his hand, and gazed intently upon the wall, but with an air of abstraction, plainly showing that though he gazed in that direction, he neither saw the wall nor anything else in the room. At length, Frank, drawing himself up in his seat, like a man determined to shake off the influence of drowsiness, exclaimed :

“ By jove, Burnet, I am getting as mopish as yourself. Your company has infected me, I think ; why don’t you drink off your wine like a man ? Come, let us reflect no more on the past.”

“ Aye, that’s more easily said than done,” answered James.

“ Well, but a little of that philosophy which I have heard you vaunt so highly ; why, you used to philosophize like a very Socrates.”

“ Pshaw, Frank; philosophy is the very phantom of the schoolmen’s brains, that flies us when we most need it; a man may case

himself in that same philosophy and fancy that he is clad in armour of proof, but the first care finds out a crevice. Pshaw ! what is philosophy when opposed to our affection ! ”

“ But the *cause*—the *cause*, Master James. There is no need of all this, I say.”

“ And I tell you, Frank Middleton, that there is ample cause—deep, and strong, and terrible cause. Have I not brought disgrace and dishonour—no ! no ! not dishonour, but disgrace, on my poor Blanche ; for see you not, that in this world of seeming purity, suspicion is well nigh as bad as reality, and the consequences of crime are sure to fall on the head of the innocent. Disgrace and poverty are upon Blanche, and calumny with its creeping step and pointed finger is about her. I have seen the wink, and heard the whisper, and though she is as honest and pure as the best of them—thief and harlot are the epithets they brand her with—yes, thief and harlot ! and you, who are the thief and the cause of all this misery to the poor child, sit

bearding me to the face, and I do not plunge my dagger into you, fool and coward as I am!" and he stamped furiously on the floor.

Frank turned pale, and drew back his chair, for there was a deep frown upon the brow of Burnet, who ground his teeth in an agony of rage and impatience.

"Yes, thief and harlot!" continued Burnet more calmly, for the violence of his rage had spent its force, "thief and harlot, on that open, harmless, innocent girl. Before this accursed mischance, Frank, she was the fairest, and the gayest, and loveliest creature that the heart of man ever doted on; her step was as free as a fawn's, and her golden hair gleamed over a face that was bright sunshine from morn till eve, and there was that in the light of her laughing eyes that made the heart tingle to look upon; and then she never spoke aught but kindness and gentleness. If ever I thought it worth while to anger her, she made me blush for my unman-

liness, for she said it was worth while only for the pleasure of making it up again. But now," he added with a sigh, "her face is pale, her step sluggish, and she is no more like the Blanche she was, than a spectre is to a being of flesh and blood."

" Well, James, I still say mourning will not bring back her elastic tread, nor her smiling face, and grieving on your part is worse than folly. And as for the girl she will not die of grief, I warrant. Why, man, they are all alike ; a few tears—a few sobs—a thousand good resolutions, and a kiss for the first lad that will give her a new set of ribbons. Zounds, Burnet, I thought you a better judge than to heed the wimpering of a light lass."

" Infernal slanderer ! " exclaimed James, starting up so suddenly as to overturn his chair, and pulling his sword-belt round, till the hilt of the weapon was brought under his hand.

Middleton also arose, and grasping his weapon, seemed ready for defence.

" Speak aught against Blanche Stewart," exclaimed Burnet, furiously, " and I will make you eat your words, though I should have to cram them down your throat with the point of my sword."

" I would rather choke upon my own anger than your steel, most doughty knight; and look you—I am like to do so if I swallow the same, for I am not used to take a threat, like a blast of the east wind, or to receive 'the lie' with a thank ye, sir. I am not a dog that ye may kick or spit upon, and if I keep my steel in the scabbard it is less in fear than in friendship ; but I beg you to be pacified, I did but speak after the trick of my tongue, as a professed decoyer of the sex. I may have seen the worst side of them, but I hold the merits of women in very low estimation, and as I say, I merely spoke after my wont."

" If that were all, I am answered, Frank ; but you should not jest with misery ; this affair has completely unmanned me, and I feel as

sensitive as if the nerves of my body were laid bare; and what in former days would have caused a hearty laugh, now touches me to the quick. And for the matter of the jest," continued Burnet, resuming his seat, in which act he was followed by his companion, "it is at best a very thread-bare subject and theme for petty witlings to spend their second-hand shafts upon."

"Well, 'most potent, grave, and reverend signor,' I will forswear my evil ways, and shade my eyes with my hand when next I come into the presence of all powerful beauty; I was ever a careless subject of Cupid, but although I love the sparkle of a bright eye as well as any man, it must be at the command of this powerful talisman," and he tossed up his purse, catching it as it descended.

"I never thought, Frank Middleton, to feel so much disgust towards you as I have lately experienced."

"Plain words, and free, Master James

Burnet; but you were ever plain-spoken, and as for the matter of a pretty face, it shall not mar the friendship between such old companions as we are. But, come, drink your wine, it's more constant and faithful than woman's smile—and what's more, less treacherous than woman's tears. Good wine is a good honest creature—is it not?"

"Ah, Frank, 'every inordinate cup is un-bless'd and the ingredient a devil.'"

"Foiled at my own fence, by St. Anthony. Well, it does my heart good to hear thee quote old Will—'tis something like old times, when we were as joyous as a couple of crickets. Oh, the merry days—ah, and the merry nights, too, for there is that in the night that the day cannot boast of—when the chimes have clinked the longest time they can tell, when the bright bowl sparkles in a better light for mirth and revelry than ever the sun had to boast, and humour and wit, great and good, rise to the lips like the gush of a fountain, and the jest passes round, and

the freedom of the tavern and the tankard lets loose every tongue, and there are no petticoats to quarrel about :

‘For ‘tis merry in the hall,
When beards wag all.’

“ Ah, ah, ah ! Burnet, those were the times.”

“ My last song is sung, and my last dance danced, I think, Frank,” replied James sorrowfully.

“ Pshaw ! mere words—mere words—whilst this cursed black cloud is over you.”

“ Nay, Frank, I am not the man I was, nor are you, though you try to rant and dash the world aside. We have been a couple of reckless, fearless, roystering lads, fond of adventure for its own sake, without any better or worse purpose than the frolic of the hour, wanting only immediate excitement—full of life, joy, mirth. But we are now *men*, and though vice and folly may still cling to us, we have more object, more real, though less

apparent, energy. Yes, Frank, we are changed —you are a worse, and I am a better man, with more depth, though less warmth of feeling, more passion, with less emotion. What I shall be, the course of events must very much determine. I had pictured to myself—”

“Love in a cottage,” interrupted Frank. “The old cant of a reformed rake. Blanche Stewart and a couple of cows; a litter of pigs and a quiver full of children; Blanche most graceful whilst churning the butter, and James bared to the elbows wheeling his barrow, with a squad of ducks dabbling in the mud, and a brood of chickens groping on the dung-hill—ha, ha, ha! what a picture of domestic bliss.”

“And what may you have pictured for yourself, Frank? To drag out a lazy, useless life, in town, to sleep on a tavern bench till noon, till you are aroused by the buzzing flies, or choked out by the fumes of stale beer and tobacco; to be a hanger-on of the theatre, a

looker-on of the gaming table, to waste your health in the tavern, and your wit in the attiring room ; your valour on the road, and at last, if you escape the gallows, (which I very much doubt) to be stabbed in some filthy debauch, and be buried in the Thames."

" Ah, ha, ha ! James ; depend upon it, I'll cheat the gallows, or my name is not Frank Middleton."

" Not if you follow your new trade of robbery and violence. How long have you commenced this profession ?"

" As I am a man of my word, the attack upon old Goodness, or Good-for-nothing, or whatever you may call him, was my first essay."

" Shall it be your last ? Say *yes*, and stick to your promise, or here we part for ever."

" Well, I will pledge you in this glass of glorious Burgundy, never again to take purse by open violence ; but, mind ye, that does not include a little honest cheating, or ' making the most of one's abilities,' as we call it. Truth

to say, I am ashamed of such coarse, butcherly work; nor do I wish my neck to know the weight of my body. But, mark me, James, I cannot answer for my confederates."

"Why associate with such men?"

"Policy, policy, my lad, as you shall hear anon; but touching these troubles of thine, and this Blanche Stewart."

"Say nothing of her, Middleton; she is too pure to be profaned by the mouth of a town rake and profligate."

"Whew! must one not speak of her excell-
lentissima; why, she is the very duchess of
dairy-maids, and the empress of all the hay-
ricks. I'll be sworn she would not pout if
she heard me say so."

"Mention not her name, Frank, or, if you do, mention her as one of a totally different order of beings to what you have been accustomed, into whose natures you cannot enter."

"What sort of being—"

"Such an one as you cannot understand,

one whose purity and guilelessness and harmless glee is far above your conception—such a being is as difficult for you to comprehend as it is for a blind man to conceive light and colour.”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha !—well said, my newly fledged saint. Give me leave to have an hour’s parley with her, and I’ll bet you a dozen of the best Burgundy in old Boniface’s cellar, that I get a kiss from your Hebe; will you let me try ?”

“ Try,” almost screamed James Burnet. “ Try ! you—you—Frank Middleton—you are the most—well, no matter what you are —you are my friend, and I am a villain. We have fed together; we have slept together; we have been as brothers, with one heart and one hope; but by the heaven above, if you lift a finger against, or say a word of disrespect, or even think disparagingly of Blanche, by all that is sacred, I will have your heart’s blood ! ”

“ Why, my friend, you are the first to dis-

parage her ; your refusal to let me speak with her proves that you have no confidence in her."

" In her, I have the most unbounded confidence; in you, not the slightest. Oh, Frank, to what have I brought her—to all that a woman shrinks from and fears more than death itself. Innocent, though she be, I have made her the scorn of the honest and the triumph of the base; the reproof of the wise and the pity of the good Yes, to this hopeless condition have I or you reduced poor Blanche Stewart."

Stung almost to madness by the reflection, Burnet seized the huge bottle of Burgundy, and took so long and deep a draught that when he put it down he fairly gasped for breath.

" By my grandfather's beard, that is hearty," cried Frank. " I love the man who will drown his cares in the bottle; 'tis the best way in the world."

" Curse the world! it will laugh at misery and weep at joy."

"Aye, that's right, my friend, curse the world, it gives no encouragement to men of mettle, like you and me."

"And the devil take the people, they are a pack of stony brutes, Frank."

"Oh, yes, by all means, hang the people, James, they are hard creditors."

"Slanderers and backbiters."

"Bailiffs and catchpols, James. Come, fill a bumper, and we'll drink confusion to the world, and to the village of Thorpeton, in particular."

"Nay, fill your glass, Frank, and name your own toast."

"Well then, Burnet," said Middleton, looking fixedly at his companion, "here's confusion to James Stuart, by all that's unlucky, King of Great Britain and Ireland, the most beastly bigot, and bull-headed tyrant that ever sat upon a throne."

"Whew!" exclaimed Burnet, with a long subdued whistle, "you are over bold me-

thinks ; stone walls have ears, and treason is a weighty matter.”

“ Pshaw ! man, the country is brim full of treason, and who will call me to account ; the fellows down stairs are too full of ale or brandy to heed our words.”

“ No such thing, Frank, liquor is the most loyal thing in creation. I have known a bowl of punch make good subjects of the most arrant grumblers that ever lived. Frank, Frank, there is rare loyalty in a hogs-head of strong ale.”

“ Well, the clodpols care more to-night about the Queen of the May, than they do of the King of England ; they have been toasting her this half hour.”

“ And so will we, Frank, here’s to the bright eyes of the beauty of the Rookery.”

“ Excellent, excellent, James ; you take your wine now like a jolly fellow ; but tell me, Burnet, who is the lass that has been chosen ‘ Queen of the May.’ ”

"Nay, I know not who has been selected this year. Last year, I was away, but before that—"

Burnet stopped abruptly, for remembrance of the past caused a cloud of grief and anxiety to fall upon his brow ; he leaned back in his chair and again pressed his hands upon his eyes.

"James Burnet," asked his companion, "what would you say to the man who should point out the way by which you might lead Blanche Stewart back to honour and happiness."

These words were pronounced in a tone of voice so impressive and emphatic—so unlike the ordinary levity of the gambler, that Burnet removed his hands from his eyes, and gazed fixedly into his friend's face.

"There are other countries besides England," went on Frank.

Burnet's face brightened for an instant, but then resumed its cast of deep despondency.

"There are means of procuring money,"

continued Frank ; not appearing to notice the gloom over his companion's face.

Burnet looked inquisitively.

"There are other Kings than James the Second."

Burnet drew his chair closer, to that of his friend, and gazed fixedly at him, as if to signify his intention to listen.

Middleton arose and went to the door to see if it was properly shut. He opened it and looked out into the dark passage, and then closed it, and again resumed his seat. There was something so totally at variance with the ordinary levity of the gambler in his bearing, that James waited in breathless expectation for the coming communication. Middleton drew his seat close to that of Burnet, and in a half whisper commenced an explanation, which, as it will be hereafter alluded to as having very important results we shall not now relate, but rather attend the steps of our favourite, Susan Burnet, and her worthy god-father.

CHAPTER IX.

THE moon was shedding its silvery light upon the earth, and, though by no means so bright as it was likely to be two hours later, was sufficient to show Master Goodman and his fair companion that the cottage which they were approaching wore a different appearance to that which it had hitherto borne ; the little garden in front, which had always been a pattern of neatness and industry, was now neglected ; that home which had been the abode of peace and contentment had become the habitation of grief and despair. A sloping thatched roof, with here and there patches of moss, lichen, and houseleek, which,

even in the moonlight, shone a bright green, covered the white-washed building, interspersed with dark beams after the fashion of the country, with a low porch and lattice window, which was the residence of Blanche Stewart and her bed-ridden grandmother.

The fruit trees were, at this delightful season, in full blossom, forming a sort of spectral white in the moonlight. The appendages to the cottage consisted of a well of water, a stand of bee-hives, a churn, and all the addenda of a real English snuggery ; but the garden evidently required the accustomed careful tending, for the borders were covered with weeds, springing up amidst the flowers. The pale primrose was overtopped by the gaudy yellow of the intruding crows-foot ; the blushing hepatica was half choked by the growth of the rank chick-weed, while the thistle and the wall-flower flourished side by side.

Goodman undid the fastening of the little gate and led his god-daughter through the garden ;

he tapped upon the door with his cane, but no answer was returned ; he stepped a pace or two back, and looked up at the windows, but they were all in darkness, except from the glittering of the moonlight upon the small panes ; he returned, and struck still harder at the door, but received no answer, so he lifted the latch, and opened the door, which was neither bolted nor locked, a custom in the country villages at the period of which we write

The common apartment into which Goodman and his fair companion stepped was in darkness, but through the numerous crevices of an inner door a light gleamed and a low monotonous sound, as of some one reading (though often interrupted by heavy sighs and sobs), was recognized by Goodman as the dulcet voice of Blanche. Unwilling to interrupt, the old man drew Susan's arm within his own, and continued to listen. The voice was sometimes audible, and the visitors, as they listened, caught the words of that

divine psalmist, who, having drunk inspiration from the fountain of truth and knowledge, has poured the strains of his fervid poetry, like oil and balm, into the hearts of the afflicted for thousands of years.

At length the reading ceased, and a low murmur in another voice—the import of which they could not catch—was heard. Then again the tones of Blanche mournfully, but in lowest, sweetest cadence, commenced a hymn. There was something inexpressibly touching in that strain, which went straight to the hearts of both listeners, but more especially to that of Master Goodman, who recognised the voice that he had been accustomed to hear in mirthful, playful, juvenile glee, constantly carolling as blitheful as the lark; but now, as sad as it was sweet. The good old man disengaged his arm from Susan's to enable him to rub his hand across his eyes.

“Cheer up, cheer up, my dearest child,” at length was heard from the hollow and

sepulchral voice of the poor and bed-ridden grandmother. "Cheer up, my child, it will all be well yet; cheer up, my lass, and read me the eighty-fifth Psalm. I'll not be likely to ask it many more times of ye."

Goodman, however, thought it the proper moment to introduce himself and Susan, knowing that when Blanche obeyed her grandmother's command, he should not be so well able to intrude. A slight tap at the door aroused the attention of Blanche, and she instantly admitted them into the inner apartment.

Upon a low flock-bed, over the head of which were arranged a few tattered hangings, with that degree of sedulous attention which marked the brave but wearisome struggle between neatness and poverty, was extended the worn-out and emaciated body of Dame Stewart. She was very old, and as helpless as she was old, and her sunken, hollow eyes, her thin fingers and bony hands, her pallid face and lips, and the difficulty with which

respiration was performed, all seemed to favour the notion that the poor woman was closely approaching the very last stage of life. In her younger days she had been a hale, hearty woman, and almost up to a very short period had supported herself by spinning and lace-making, with the trifling assistance which her granddaughter had afforded her.

The grandmother had watched over the life of her grandchild with the most devoted attachment, endeavouring to the best of her means and abilities to supply the place of those parents whom she had lost when an infant; and when she heard of Blanche's misfortune—when the officers of justice dragged the girl, half insensible, to a public examination before Sir Richard Jenkins, and when she returned expelled from Lady Esther Vince's, overwhelmed with sorrow, the object of suspicion, dishonoured, and disgraced—the constitution of the decrepit octogenarian received a shock which evidently hastened its decline.

Blanche had been kneeling by the bedside, near to which she had placed a chair, having upon it a candle, and well-thumbed, well-worn Bible.

"A blessed evening to you, Dame Stewart," began Goodman as he entered. "My god-daughter, Susan, has come with me to wish you good-night, as well as to see if we can do anything to bring you comfort."

"And it's done like yourself, William Moore, you were always true-hearted; more's the pity that there's so few like you in this wicked world. Ye should have had my granddaughter, as I told you, if all had gone well, but He ordained it otherwise, and we must submit. And as to comfort, William Moore, I have springs of comfort, such as none of ye can understand. Wells of water—wells of water in a dry and thirsty land. Yes! blessed be the Lord of Heaven, I have unknown comfort, William Moore."

"This is not William Moore, mother," interrupted Blanche, "but our worthy and

every-ready friend Master Goodman, whom you know and esteem so well."

"Dearee me, and so it is," said the old woman, shading her eyes, and peering out from under her hand, at her good friend ; "see, now, what it is to have such a memory —but, alas ! my eyes seem full of darkness—well, well, it's strange that I did not know my old gossip—and how is the mistress, and all your little curly pates?"

"I have got neither one nor t'other, Dame Stewart, as luck would have it—your wits are gone wool-gathering I suspect," replied Goodman, with an attempt at a smile.

"Ha ! ha ! ha ! and so I do declare they are, neighbour—and so they are ; but I see you now—eh, man ! that I should not know you, how strange. I cannot make it out—sometimes I seem to know my own darling Blanche and then again what happened yesterday, I entirely forget ; but then there are other things that one might think had clean gone out o' mind, come as free and fresh as

if they had happened yesterday. The troublous times, as they are called, aye! and long, long afore them can I remember. I even fancy myself the same gay, light-hearted, merry girl, with the same gay hat and feathers and fine dress, that I had new to go with my father to Norwich, when there were grand doings there—eh! and I fancy I can hear the bells ringing such joyous peals, and see the garlands and the Mayor, and all his fellows in scarlet and gold, and the quality folks in laces and feathers and jewels, jingling and glittering, and as proud as peacocks."

"Do you remember those days, Dame?" asked Goodman.

"Who is that? who is that?" cried the old woman, first catching a sight of Susan Burnet, "there's one in a long white robe! in a long white robe!—what does it want with me?"

"It is my god-daughter, Susan Burnet,"

said Goodman gently, “and she is come to have half-an-hour’s chat with Blanche.”

At the mention of the name of Burnet, Blanche’s pale cheek flushed, and tears started into her eyes; while her grandmother repeated the name two or three times.

“Burnet, Burnet, I ought to know that name, or is it only a dream,” and the old woman continued mumbling and muttering, and repeating the name of Burnet, and making it take a prominent part in the events of the civil war.

Meanwhile Susan approached the unhappy Blanche, who stood trembling from head to foot, hanging down her head. By the conversation between Susan and her godfather recorded before, it appears that the former had no personal acquaintance with Blanche Stewart; this can only be accounted for by the very secluded manner in which Susan had been brought up, and which her love of solitude and quiet rendered not merely en-

durable, but really delightful to her. In so sequestered a place as Thorpeton, they must have met; though Susan very rarely quitted the precincts of Oakfield Hall, which afforded ample space for her solitary wanderings. At the church, however, and on some other occasions, Susan must have seen Blanche; but she was too devout and serious to think of anything but her devotions; and as to gossiping after service in the church-yard, nothing could have been more alien to her habits or more distasteful to her. Hanging on the arm of her father, she would give but brief greeting even to Thomas Goodman, who, seated on one of the flat tomb-stones, was generally to be found both before and after service, holding forth with his usual gravity and most oracular authority, to an uncommonly attentive audience. So that Susan now only recognised Blanche as the extremely pretty lively girl she had sometimes seen, but whose name she never enquired. To tell the

truth, Susan had no desire to become better acquainted. She was somewhat precise in her manner and way of speaking, and she looked upon Blanche as a gay, giddy girl, with too much levity for an associate, and too little sympathy for a friend. Old Burnet, too, whose antipathy to his son's connexion with Blanche has been hinted at, would not be likely to encourage her intimacy with his daughter, and her character, coming from his lips, was not improved; so that when the events of the robbery, with all its untoward consequences, was made known, no doubt with many embellishments, Susan too readily adopted the general opinion, that Blanche would not have been taken before a magistrate without some cause, or turned away from Lady Esther Vince's without sufficient reason. Susan, however, was an amiable, sensible, benevolent girl at heart, and no sooner did she see Blanche blushing and trembling, and weeping like a child, than her pride or prejudice gave way, and she felt

for the poor unhappy one as she would have done for a sorrowing sister.

The contrast between the two lovely girls in their personal appearance has already been alluded to, but now that they were brought into close contact, that contrast appeared more forcible, and, like the light and shade in one of R mbrandt's pictures, each rendered the other more intense. The fragile form of Blanche seemed more sylph-like than ever, standing beside the taller, more dignified, more mature outline of Susan's figure, whilst the pensive air of Susan's downcast eyes shaded by her sable tresses looked sweeter and sadder from the neighbourhood of Blanche's violet eyes and sunny locks.

The sympathy of her sex was what Blanche had most earnestly longed for in her late misfortunes, but which sympathy had been most cruelly withheld.

The gossips of the village who had grown grey, and withered in petty peculation, held up their virtuous hands in horror at robbery,

even connived at in others. Some ancient spinsters, concerning whom, perhaps, scandal was more wronged than they, but who had never been unequivocally discovered, drew in their breath with awe at the idea of a young girl staying out all night, and totally ignored the fact of Blanche's being at her grandmother's cottage—that might or might not be true,—but of one thing, they felt sure that any one who would think of thieving, would not hesitate at lying—they were sure the hussy had some bad and thoughtless companions. Such were the charitable conclusions of the female portion of the village.

Truth to say, Blanche Stewart, with all her gaiety, her fascinating manners, and her warmth of heart, was more popular with the opposite sex than with her own; her extreme beauty, perhaps, may account for this in some slight degree, for there is such a thing as envy as well as admiration; and moreover, the petulance and warmth of Blanche sometimes wounded where it was not intended,

but then the deeper wounds inflicted by her eyes caused the lesser hurt to pass unheeded ; to the said eye-artillery, her own sex were invulnerable ; and, as a matter of course, they the more keenly felt the force of her tongue. Without libelling the sex, we may assert that no female errors are so hardly forgiven as those of a beauty.

The kindness and sympathy of Susan Burnet completely overpowered poor Blanche ; she sighed, she sobbed, she burst into an hysterical flood of tears, she grasped the extended hand of Susan, and pressed it again and again to her lips ; while the latter, using her disengaged fingers to clear away the tresses from Blanche's forehead, stooped and kissed it. It was a scene which might have melted a stonier heart than that of Thomas Goodman, and by several sniffings and twitchings of the nose and mouth, and twinklings of the eyelids, it might have been discovered that he felt more than he exactly intended to express. But the most remarkable display of emotion

was that of Dame Stewart, who, as soon as she saw the dark ringlets of Susan mingle with the bright locks of Blanche, uttered a loud exclamation, something between a laugh and a scream, which startled the hearers and attracted their attention.

“Saw ye that! saw ye that!” she cried, “who dare say that Blanche Stewart is deserted and despised, when the fairest and the best give her comfort and countenance. Oh, if the blessing of an old woman, and a dying woman, a woman who has seen eighty summers and upwards, and one that has never forsaken her God, and who knows and feels that God will never forsake her, I say, if the benison of such a person can do aught for the happiness of another, it shall cling to thee, my bonny girl. And, oh! when the moulds are stopping this old mouth, as they soon will, may the blessing abide with thee, my sweet maiden, for the good, kind, and christian part ye are now taking in comforting them as would comfort ye, if ye were in

the same straight, which Heaven, in its mercy, forbid ye should ever be brought down to; even as Jacob blessed his sons, so do I bless thee, my sweet lass!"

The old woman was here interrupted by a violent fit of coughing, which grew fainter and more faint, and ended with a rattling in the throat, which somewhat alarmed Goodman.

" You should send for the doctor, and it may be the parson too, Blanche, for though I am not skilled in these matters and have seen little of death or disease either, I cannot think yon noise in the throat bodes any good. But your grandmother seems quiet just now, and I want to speak a few words to you, touching your worldly affairs.

The kind-hearted old man sat down at the foot of the bed—Susan took a chair, while Blanche stood between them.

" I'm an old man, Blanche, and though I am not a father, I might have been a father, and a grandfather, too, for the matter of that—the

happier man I am that never had none of ye to plague me; but, as I said, I might have had if it had pleased me; so you need not be over proud to tell me the state of your affairs, and ye must first tell me if ye have got any money, for I'm thinking ye'll be at a poor pass without it."

The unhappy girl admitted, with tears in her eyes, that her last shilling had been spent.

"Well, well, lass, there is no need to cry for that—I'm not a rich man, though folks say I am, but I have enough to spare as will serve your present need," and the old man produced a leathern purse, out of which he drew some silver, and gave it to Blanche. The poor girl's heart was too full for utterance, so Goodman, who perceived her embarrassment, proceeded—

"Don't thank me, lass, ye can do that another day when we have more time, and less to think of than at the present moment. And now, Blanche, you must know," here he pointed with his stick over his shoulder and

winked significantly, but as Blanche seemed not to understand him, he looked earnestly at the bed, the occupant of which was apparently in a doze, and resumed in a half whisper—

“ You see, my child, the dame cannot last long.”

Blanche’s tears fell faster.

“ Come, come, I would not make ye cry, but these matters must be thought about, and I’ll call on the ’poticary to-morrow morning, and send him down, and also upon the parson, who will doubtless step up and see her ; and they may benefit her both body and soul; but whatever the parson may say or the ’poticary may give her, she must die, as we all must sooner or later; and what I want to know now is, what’s to become of you, my child, when the wide world’s open before you, and you have ne’er a place to shelter you ?”

Blanche, who had not given that matter a thought, could, of course, give no answer to the home question.

“ For ye see,” continued the worthy friend,

" it's a hard world we live in, and a world that will think at least as bad, and it may be a shade or two worse than appearances show. I wish ye had listened to my words on that sorry night—but let that pass; you see it would not be safe and prudent for you to live here alone, after all that has happened, even if you had the means to enable you to do so, and James Burnet has no home to offer you, though he were willing, as I much doubt."

Blanche, dismayed by this view of her position, which her simplicity had never pictured, answered not a word, and only gazed despondingly in Goodman's face.

" Well, Blanche, I see ye're not prepared to answer me; but I tell ye, lass, that I have thought of this matter and talked of it to my god-daughter as we came here, and the wisest and best plan that we have been able to hit upon, is for you to try and get back again to Lady Esther Vince's, where ye may be out of the way of James Burnet, and the world as well."

Blanche shook her head mournfully, saying—

“Lady Esther will never take me back again.”

“Ye cannot tell that, Blanche, until ye have tried. When she sent you adrift the robbery was fresh and new; but time salves all sores. Oh, what a blessing it would be if we had the wisdom sometimes to stand still and allow the storm to pass; it would blow over our heads; but we must be meddling, and so walk with it. Come, Blanche, all may be forgotten.”

Blanche shook her head.

“Oh, my woman, 'tis well we have weak memories, for look ye, as men are not so easy to forgive, it's well they forget. You might try, at least, Blanche.”

“I will try, if you wish it, Master Goodman, you are my best, if not my only friend; and though I misdoubt Lady Esther's forgiveness, I will not say ye nay. But depend on it, Lady Esther is troubled with too good

a memory, since ye call a bad memory a blessing."

"Spoken like Blanche Stewart; there was that in the tone of your voice, and in the twinkle of your eye, that reminded me of old days. Now listen to me, my child, if ye fail to get a home at Lady Esther's, there's a small place out beyond the hill called Goodman's Farmstead, where you will find an old man, of threescore years and upwards, without child or grandchild, and, if the world frown you out, ye shall come there and be both to him."

Blanche fell on her knees, and with an hysterical fit of weeping, grasped the hand of Goodman, and sobbed aloud. Dame Stewart, exhausted with her last effort, had regarded the passing scene with complete apathy, but the sobs of her beloved grandchild seemed to arouse her attention.

"Don't ye cry, dear Blanche," she said, "and ye shall go and dance round the Maypole, and ye shall go with me to the fair."

Then as if comprehending the cause of Blanche's emotion, she said—

“ And will ye, my kind friend, be a father to the fatherless, and take care of my poor child?—oh, if ye will promise this, then will my old eyes close in peace.”

“ She's much feebler,” whispered Goodman, for a visible change had come over her face. “ I wish we had asked the parson to come up, it might have been a comfort to her.”

“ And what for should ye have asked the parson,” said the old woman, who to their surprise had overheard what had been whispered ; “ what comfort could he have given me; look ye, neighbour, if ye don't learn all that the parson can tell ye long before ye come to this pass, it will be very, very late, perhaps too late. I am not one of those who put aside the thought of death till it stares them in the face, and think it time enough to make their peace when their peace should be made. It's a bad time, my friend, to be

learning the path of life when death is knocking at the door, and being driven to hope from the very bitterness of fear. Eh, man! When the body's breaking up, and the pains of death are upon ye—when ye are faint, and sick, and have lost the right use of yer senses, and 'tis all confusion, and the days of your youth come fresh before you, and your whole life long seems crushed into a few minutes' dreaming—if ye haven't minded the matters of another world before then, the Lord have mercy upon you!"

The solemnity of this appeal subdued the party to silence, and Susan Burnet especially regarded the dying woman with profound attention. Blanche, with her hand before her eyes continued to weep, mute and motionless, while Goodman sat leaning upon his cane, occasionally shaking his head with great gravity, as if cogitating on the words he had just heard. He was, however, the first to break the silence, and taking Blanche's hand, who still knelt before him, he began slowly to offer

words of counsel and admonition to her, leaving Susan anxiously gazing at the dying woman.

Goodman, with all his kindness of heart, was a little dogmatical, and when he found a listener so attentive, so submissive as Blanche had now become, he was fond of holding forth ; so he kept up a sort of murmuring stream of words to Blanche, occasionally interrupting his address with a half-soliloquy. Susan maintained her watching, and Blanche remained half-sitting, half-kneeling on the floor, her hands clasped and lying upon her lap, her bright eyes glistening through her tears and intently regarding Goodman. The feeble light of the candle, neglected as it had been, but faintly illumined the apartment, small as it was. Goodman's voice grew more and more low, and at length dropped into a whisper, for the death-like stillness of his listeners oppressed him ; still he continued to talk—he spoke of James Burnet and of old Burnet, and what

he wished to do for the son and how he pitied the father ; but interesting as these topics might be to Susan she heeded them not, she only gazed the more fixedly upon the face of the old woman. She thought she saw a smile upon the invalid's countenance, but it was only the flickering of the candle, which at the same time made the shadow of Goodman quiver upon the ceiling and the wall. Again the old woman seemed to smile, it was only a convulsive movement of her muscles. The room grew darker and darker as the wick of the candle grew longer, and the face of the old woman became darker too ; but Susan fancied that the few teeth, which even at her advanced age she retained, became more prominent—it might be only fancy—her eyes were closed, but when they opened there was a preternatural brilliance about them—a glassy glare which well nigh startled the watcher; then there came a stern rigidity upon the sharpened features, the lips turned blue —there was a shudder and a sigh, and the

hands which lay outside the coverlet turned well nigh backward in convulsive agony—Susan arose and pressed one hand in silence upon Master Goodman's arm and pointed with the other to the bed. The old man turned to look, and Blanche, starting to her feet and clinging to Susan for support, gazed also on the bed and the fearful thing that reposed upon it. Only for a minute did she gaze—the next instant she broke the mute and breathless silence with a loud scream, throwing herself upon the breathless body of her last and only relative.

"What is to be done now?" asked Goodman, after a pause. "We cannot leave the poor child alone, and she will hardly go with us. I have it, Susan. You shall stay here while I step up to the cottage on the hill and get assistance."

"Or suppose we reverse your plan, Master Goodman. I will hasten to the neighbours while you wait here, for, to tell the truth, I

am faint and sick with this terrible scene, and
the night air will revive me."

"Get you gone then, my love; and may
God speed you."

With that Susan Burnet wrapped her
mantle around her and sallied forth upon her
mission of Christian charity.

CHAPTER X.

SUSAN BURNET, immediately after leaving the room of mourning, passed out into the small garden in front of the house, not with her accustomed slow and precise step, but at a pace which, with ordinary people, would have been termed a quick walk, but with her it was almost a run. She opened the gate and passed through with alacrity, but scarcely had she done so, than her speed was arrested by a man of most repulsive appearance placing his hand upon her shoulder, and at the same time putting his foot against the gate so as to prevent her re-opening it. The girl looked on the revolt-

ing face of the man who had thus rudely detained her, but neither spoke nor uttered any cry of alarm, although she trembled from head to foot. Her education and retired habits had tended to make her timid; but her natural strength of mind gave her great moral courage and calmness in difficulties. It has often been said that bravery and gentleness are incompatible, but this is an erroneous notion. To describe a woman as courageous, perhaps gives the impression that she is a masculine character — one of those self-dependent females termed strong-minded, and, consequently, very unloveable women. But to assert that courage is inconsistent with a truly feminine character, is utterly libellous. No, the purest, sweetest, loveliest display of all that is lovely, pure, and holy in woman, is often in perfect harmony with the most courageous soul. Nothing is more detestable to the generality of men than an Amazon; yet there are instances of female valour, aye, and even military courage, displayed, allied

to, and amalgamated with, the most delicate and feminine charms. Who ever imagined the actions of Joan of Arc or the workings of her mind to be those of an Amazon ?

There was a slight pause, which gave Susan an opportunity, by aid of the brilliant moonlight, to scan more narrowly the features of Hardbottle, for he it was, and she looked with horror upon a face of grinning ugliness, whilst he gloated upon her lovely, striking beauty. Jack was one of those characters so often met with in the world, who fancy, with a singular combination of personal and moral deficiency, that they are exceedingly agreeable to the fair sex, and it was, therefore with an air of the greatest arrogance and perfect confidence, which he thought easy gallantry and gentlemanly bearing, that he commenced :

“ We are well met, my pretty damsel ; this lucky encounter has saved me the trouble of seeking you at home.”

Seeing the impossibility of escaping him,

Susan turned round and walked away without deigning a reply.

“ Well, my lass, if you are for a moonlight ramble, I shall do my best to make your walk agreeable.”

Susan hastened on, but in a few strides he put his arm round her waist. She indignantly dashed away his hand, but fearing lest her violence should instigate him to some more fearful insult, she exclaimed :

“ If you are a man—if you are a gentleman—if ever you had mother or sister to defend—I implore you not to molest me, but let me pass.”

“ That I am a man, and a soldier, to boot, fair maiden, let my friends and foes proclaim—that I am a gentleman, the wearing my sword sufficiently indicates. That I have had a mother is unquestionably true, and, I believe, a sister, but what my having had a mother and a sister has to do with our present happy meeting I am somewhat at a loss to understand. As a man and a soldier, I claim

a kiss from your ruby lips ; as a gentleman, I claim to be free and like where I list. Therefore I stand upon my rights as a man and a gentleman to claim a kiss from one whom I love better than all the mothers and sisters in the world."

"I beseech you, sir, let me either return to the cottage, or speed upon my errand."

"Nay, nay, my lovely Blanche, I am not so great a fool as to allow you to re-enter the cottage. A bird in the hand is worth a hundred in the bush."

"I implore you, sir, to let me pass ; if you are, as you say, a man and a soldier, act like the one or the other—defend a helpless woman, and aid me in my dire necessity," pleaded the young girl.

"Nay, my pretty damsel, though you speak sweetly and kindly, you shall not turn me from my purpose. I came here to have a talk with thee, and fortune has befriended me ; although I had determined to hunt thee into thy cover, without knowing exactly how

to get rid of thy grand-dame ; but having found thee, do you think I am so poor a sportsman to let my game hie to cover again when it is already started to my hand."

" You say you are a gentleman ; your speech is not that of the country side ; your dress betokens that you are not a village clown. Oh ! sir, act as becomes your station, and let me pass unmolested. I am not the unhappy girl whom you take me for ; but suppose I were, misery is a poor plea for oppression ; at any rate, begone for the present, for it is an hour of unutterable anguish."

" Oh, very well, Blanche, if you will make an appointment with me I—"

" Mistake me not—mistake me not—I am not she whom you seek."

" Ah ! ah ! ah ! my lass ! so you want to persuade me that you are not yourself ; no ! no ! I am not so easily deceived. But now that I look again into your lovely eyes, I begin to doubt ; suppose I go into the

cottage, and see if I cannot find another Blanche."

"Yes! do; and then, if you have a particle of manly feeling, you will learn a lesson of pity from distress and helplessness."

"An excellent notion; and in the meantime, I suppose you intend to start off, and get one of your village lovers to come with a pitchfork and bull-dog, whose throat I shall be obliged to cut."

Jack here threw open his vest in a somewhat theatrical style, and the moonlight glistened upon the butts of a pair of pistols, while from the same belt he drew a dagger, and felt its point with the air of a connoisseur.

Susan shrunk from this display of arms, but the ruffian quickly replaced the weapon.

"Come, my pretty Blanche," he said, "pistols and daggers have little to do with thee, and me—alas! what weapon could have half the power to wound like the bright eyes of Blanche Stewart."

“ You mistake ; as there is a Heaven above I assure you I am not Blanche Stewart.”

“ Oaths weigh not with me. Why I have made them by thousands, and broken them by hundreds, and for one sweet smile of that lovely face of thine, would make and break as many more. You see, sweet Blanche, I am candid with you, for you are no common peasant and easily trapped, and James Burnet is too perfect a master of the art not to have taught thee long ere this the nature of a lover’s oath.”

“ James Burnet ! ” cried Susan indignantly, “ what know ye of James Burnet ? ”

“ It was at his particular request that I came to seek you here—he is my most intimate friend—or rather my friend’s friend.”

“ Thy friend ! ” exclaimed Susan contemptuously, forgetting fear in anger, for her brother was dear to her still. “ Thy friend ! ” she repeated, with a voice as firm as if there were no such things as pistols and daggers in

the ruffian's belt, "I will never believe that James Burnet would ever condescend to hold communion with thee, but would rather spurn and kick thee from his presence."

"Sharp words," said Hardbottle, his face becoming livid, his nose scarlet, and grinding his teeth, "what the devil do ye mean—I will be revenged one way or the other; but come, this is all foolery, look ye, Burnet has left this part of the country, and before he went he begged me to come and say farewell to you for him. But don't let that distress you, for I will be more to you than Burnet has ever been."

"It is a lie!" almost shouted the young girl, "it is a bare-faced falsehood, worthy alike of a bully and a coward."

"By the infernal regions," roared Hardbottle, "if a *man* had dared to have uttered such words to me—"

"You would never have provoked a *man* so far," rejoined the girl, "your hollow, flimsy scheme to deceive a poor unprotected woman

is as shallow a device as ever sprung from an empty head and a bad heart. You are a contemptible ruffian, and undeserving the name of either soldier or man; and depend on it, when I come to speak with James Burnet, I will make him horse-whip you for daring to call yourself his friend."

"Oh! oh! my indignant lass, so you are not ashamed to acknowledge your lover, seeing that you have defended him so vigorously, and now I suppose you will not again deny your name."

"I am his ——" sister, she would have said, but prudence or policy arrested the word, for she did not wish to be personally known to such a reprobate, and by identifying herself with Blanche, she hoped to be able to save her from some persecution, if, as was not improbable, she should subsequently encounter him. I am not likely to disgrace the name she thought,—I shall do poor Blanche no harm, perhaps some benefit, by receiving her title, so, when she had said "I am his,"

she left Hardbottle to fill up the blank in his own way, which he did not fail to do. Anger and disdain had so completely mastered her fear, that, now passing her tormentor, she had courage to proceed upon her intended errand. Fortunately for her resolve, her path lay through an open meadow, which was fully illumined by the broad moonlight, for had the pathway she had taken been rendered dark by the shade of trees or hedges, perhaps she would not have been so bold. It is amazing how much courage lies in a good light. We do not pretend to say that Susan's pulse beat temperately, or that she was divested of fear; but gentle and placid as she was, the high tone of moral courage, the complete presence of mind which was one of her most valuable gifts, enabled her to pursue her walk without showing any apparent perturbation.

Hardbottle, however, was as resolute as the young girl; he walked past her and turned round and stared at her full in the face, and

allowed her to pass him ; this manœuvre was two or three times repeated. The fact is, he was completely perplexed, for he had found Blanche Stewart much more beautiful and much more spirited than he had expected : and these points in her character gave him much difficulty in proceeding—the ruffian had set out upon his expedition without any fixed plan or purpose. Piqued by the taunts of Frank Middleton, he had determined to have a look at Blanche, determined to show his companions that he had not the fear of James Burnet before his eyes ; conversant with the worst of women, he thought he should not be too rigidly repulsed, but that with perseverance he might overcome Blanche's scruples, for into her artless, harmless, guileless character he could not enter. There are some natures which pollute everything they come in contact with—there are some eyes that see nothing but evil—alas ! the evil is only in the eye—the pollution only in the mind. To such a nature, (and such was Hardbottle's,)

cheerfulness and mirth are wantonness and vice ; gentleness and peace, are hypocrisy and art. Judged by the medium through which they are viewed, all qualities are assimilated to the nature of the observer, and he cannot conceive moral excellences of which he has no experience, nor moral sense to understand.

Hardbottle's original intention it is difficult to understand ; perhaps he himself had no fixed notion of what he intended, but whatever it was, Susan's beauty, her courageous bearing, and the utter contempt with which she treated him, roused all the passions of his brutal nature—a choice compound of the sensual and malignant. Fortunately for Susan's security there was a cold stream of cowardice running through his temperament, and though he was quite capable of the darkest and most infamous designs, fear of the consequences deterred him from actual outrage ; but if there was less immediate danger than there would have been from a braver man, or one

more rash and reckless, his designs acquired more depth of purpose by delay. He prowled around the poor girl as a tiger would round his prey; he ground his teeth as we might imagine that four-footed brute would do instigated by hunger, but he still hesitated. In the meantime Susan approached a little foot-bridge which crossed the streamlet. The water in places was deep and quiet, seeming to sleep beneath the bright moon-beams; in other parts it became a brawling brook, shallow and turbulent; its tiny waves, looking as if tipped by silver, dancing in the moon-light. At one of the deeper parts, where two high banks overhung and narrowed the stream, was the bridge, constructed of merely rough planks, with a single hand-rail on one side. At the summit of a short acclivity from this spot stood the knot of cottages to which Susan was going. Hardbottle seeing his advantage hastily passed her, and before she could place her foot upon the bridge he planted himself upon it, and turning round

confronted her. The girl was consequently obliged to stop, for the bridge was too narrow to allow of two persons passing each other, but Jack, still irresolute, spoke not a word.

"This is all child's play," at length Susan said; "and where the jest lies I confess I have not the wit to discover; but I pray you let me pass, for there is life and death on my errand."

"Tittle, tuttle, my beautiful Blanche, you are only going to meet some expectant swain — lasses have little other business abroad at this time of night. Let the boor wait, and when he does catch a sight of your pretty person it will be all the more delightful. Nay, my beauty, he shall wait my pleasure, for though you escape me to-night my turn shall come, so wait he shall, and that to no purpose unless you come to terms ; for look ye, I am bridge-keeper here and a kiss is my fee, without which you stir not a single step."

"In mercy let me pass ; I will tell you

my errand, and I beseech you believe me—poor old Dame Stewart—”

“ Curse old Dame Stewart; 'tis only young Dame Stewart that I care for—thy lovely self. Ah! ah! ah! I suppose you are the good little girl in the story books, come out to fetch a pat of butter for the grandmother, and I am the horrible wolf—only just for the moment we will change sides. La! Blanche, what bright eyes you have got—la! Blanche, what beautiful red lips you have got, all the better to pay me the bridge toll.”

“ This passes all endurance. I assure you, you mistake both my name and errand. I tell you I am going—”

“ To give me a kiss—nay! nay! you are not going except upon condition—”

“ Let me pass then, and I promise to return to this spot.”

“ What, with a lot of clodpoles with cudgels in their brawny fists! No, I am too old a bird to be caught with chaff. I am London bred, where such tricks are of every

hour occurrence, and we know better how to treat a foward damsels."

"It cannot be," exclaimed Susan, indignantly. "I do not believe that London can suffer such mean and dastardly conduct as I am enduring at your hands; that there is dissipation, excess, and profligacy I have heard; but I don't believe a place which is the resort of the refined and the elegant is disgraced by such contemptible brutality; it cannot be that men, where honor is to be won, and where reputation is to be lost, lower themselves beneath the level of the poorest cow-boy, and render themselves utterly despised in the eyes of that sex by whom the good seek to be esteemed—it cannot be: a place where are thousands of the young, the brave, and the gallant, who would hunt out of society the man capable of annoying an unprotected female."

"By my soul you have a shrewd wit as well as a sharp tongue," said the ruffian, feeling a little foolish.

"But think not," she continued; "think not that we, village maidens, walk unprotected. I see a friend who will aid me at my need."

Startled and confounded, Hardbottle laid his hand upon his rapier and turned his head to see what sort of person this friend was who was to protect her: the best friend that any one can have—common sense, presence of mind, decision of character. Taking advantage of his unguarded posture, she pushed boldly between him and the hand-rail. Jack was a strong man as far as physical power was concerned, but he stood in such an awkward position with his head turned over his shoulder and his hand in his belt, that the girl's strength, exerted to the utmost and coming so unexpectedly, not only accomplished what she intended, which was to push past him, but a good deal more for he oscillated on his heels, gave a desperate grasp at the hand-rail, and missing both it and his footing fell floundering in the water beneath.

More alarmed than ever, Susan ran with all speed up the steep, and knocked loudly at the door of the first cottage. It was hastily opened, and she rushed in pale and breathless, and sank almost fainting on a chair.

CHAPTER XI.

THE farming peasantry of England, though not over clever, have a great fund of kindness and warmth of feeling in their composition, and it is rarely that a case of real emergency fails to find immediate assistance at their hands. Susan delivered her message, and several persons from the adjoining cottages to that in which she had taken refuge, prepared to accompany her on her return, and when she again reached the little bridge it was with a somewhat numerous escort, that might have defied the opposition of that most valiant knight, Jack Hardbottle. The self-elected warden of the bridge was nowhere to

be seen, but Susan was glad to perceive that the bridge displayed sundry evidences of water upon its surface, proving satisfactorily that her persecutor had managed to scramble out of the brook. This was a great relief to her mind, as she had had some fear of her late tormentor having been drowned. There was, however, no cause for terror, the depth of the streamlet was not above breast high had he jumped into the water, as it was he escaped with only a good ducking.

Hardbottle was at no great distance, for observing lights about the cottages and perceiving several persons coming towards him, he silently crept to the shelter of a tree where he concealed himself.

As Susan and her party came to the bridge one of the men observed the wetted state of the planks, and paused to remark upon the inexplicable fact; the girl, however, kept her own counsel; for she had no desire that the exploits of the night should be noised abroad, fearing to arouse the indignation and malig-

nant feeling of Hardbottle. This reserve was unnecessary, for, suspecting that she had brought her neighbours for the purpose of being revenged upon him, he felt an extra degree of malice, and this, together with what he considered the great indignity and provocation he had already received at her hands, induced him to plan deep schemes of vengeance, which, however atrocious, he was capable of taking any means to gratify. The party passed on, and arrangements were made to enable Goodman to quit the cottage, not, however, before he had given directions for the comfort and attendance upon Blanche. He then took a tender farewell of her, and, accompanied by his goddaughter, quitted the place.

Their road lay in a very different direction from that Susan Burnet had just traversed, so that she felt no apprehension of meeting her persecutor; still her pace was hurried, and she begged her godfather to excuse it, on account of the anxiety her parents would feel

at her protracted absence, for she determined, for several reasons, to say nothing to him of her adventure. The events of the night, however, were not yet over; they walked silently and swiftly on, each engaged with the thoughts passing rapidly through their minds of what had so recently transpired. Susan hoped that the repulse she had so cleverly given to the ruffian Hardbottle, would deter him from renewing his attempts upon Blanche Stewart, or if he should accidentally meet her, he would be deceived by his own mistake of her identity.

Whilst these reflections were passing in the girl's mind, Goodman was thinking of Blanche, and what might be her future fate. Thus the two companions walked silently across the meadows, then along a narrow green lane, until they came to a wood, composed not of low coppice, but principally of tall, luxuriant forest trees, which formed a thick canopy overhead, but were sufficiently distant from each other to admit of a free passage in almost

every direction. The pathway through the wood would have been too dark at any other period of the year; and, indeed, at any time, except as was the case at the present hour, when the moon was shining brightly, aiding the practised eye and local knowledge of Goodman. As they proceeded they were somewhat startled to observe a light glimmering at some distance amongst the trees. They knew that an old out-house, said to be haunted by the ghost of a village swain who hung himself for some fancied neglect of a village maiden, was situated somewhere in the centre of the wood, and report said that a light had often been seen there when all respectable people should have been fast asleep in their beds; but Goodman had always laughed at the legend, wisely concluding that if all mortal eyes were closed, no mortal eyes could have seen the said lights, and he was not disposed to think that he was likely to be the person selected for a supernatural visitation; upon consideration he was

convinced the light was not precisely in the direction of the out-house, and above all, that it was not stationary. With a slow and steady motion it passed on, and at length was suddenly extinguished ; to the old man this appeared a most inexplicable affair ; the light was too steady for a Will-o'-the-wisp, and too high from the ground, for it seemed about the height of a man's hand ; still he could not conceive what could have induced any of the villagers to be wandering about the wood at such a late hour. Susan, whose nerves had received a severe shock from the previous events of the evening, trembled violently, and Goodman led her silently and cautiously along, doubtful in his own mind as to what sort of company they might meet.

They had not proceeded many yards before the hum of voices fell distinctly upon their ears, and the old man, placing his companion, whose light dress might attract attention, in the midst of a thicket, crept gently and cautiously forward, keeping his person in the

dark shade until he could look into an open glade which was cut through the wood. Here, by the aid of the bright moonlight, he could plainly see two or three men, as well as several horses, which were tied together by the bridles. One man was in livery, and the others had the appearance of grooms and stable men, but he saw they were all armed, for the moon-beams glittered upon swords and butts of pistols.

"Here is some evil going forward," thought Goodman, as he gazed intently upon the display of men and arms, and the thought had scarcely passed ere a low whistle was heard and answered by one of the party, and immediately after several others came from the cover of the wood, most of them enveloped in cloaks and the large boots then in vogue, their spurs jingling and glittering in the moonlight. In short, they were evidently of superior rank to the surrounding peasantry. They appeared deeply engaged in conversation, but having come to the place

by previous appointment, they mounted the horses which had been kept in readiness for them, and rode off ; the pedestrians also taking their departure in different directions.

Goodman's heart beat quickly as two of the pedestrians passed close to the place where he stood, and still more so when they reached the thicket where Susan was concealed, but fortunately they were too earnestly engaged in conversation to heed either of the hiders. The old man listened to their discourse, but could make little or nothing out of the disjointed words which he caught, but what he could hear assured him that it was some political object they had in view, a subject in which he felt no particular interest.

Finding the coast clear, he went back and brought Susan Burnet from her concealment ; he told her he could not understand the business correctly, but he feared there was mischief brewing, and he thought they had better make the best of their way home, a proposition to which she gladly agreed, and they

started off at a rapid pace. They were, however, not destined to go peacefully forward, for an interruption of a more formidable character awaited them. They were not yet clear of the wood, but as they were now in a path which led only to Oakfield Hall, Goodman consoled his trembling companion with the assurance that they should get safely home. They had to pass a piece of open ground, where a spring of water bubbled up amongst rank weeds and grass, and which had once been the resort of miracle seekers, where miraculous cures had been effected, or what answered the same purpose were said to have been effected, but the basin had long been broken, and the architectural beauties of the fountain were now buried in stinging nettles and noxious weeds ; all that remained was a mutilated cross or crucifix, of somewhat large dimensions, whilst the pure spring became more valuable to the neighbouring peasantry, by nourishing, in great perfection, an abundant supply of water-cresses.

As our friends approached they were not a little startled to perceive the figure of a man standing, with folded arms upon his breast, beside the cross ; they were passing swiftly on, when the person started forward, and to Susan's dismay and horror she recognised the face and figure of Jack Hardbottle, who no sooner saw who it was, than he exclaimed, "I thought so, from the words I heard you speak when you came back to the bridge and I felt sure this would be your destination : but I did not dream of your returning with such a companion, had it been the one I had suspected and worthy of my sword he should have died for his meddling."

A little harmless bullying, when perfectly safe was quite a godsend to the ruffian.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Goodman "what's the matter, and who are you, my gay spark, who seem to know this damsel so well—what do you mean?"

"The girl knows well enough what I mean ; look ye, my lass, you have foiled me once,

there lives neither man nor woman who has done so twice. I met you with a loving smile, and you scorned and spurned me—you—no matter what you did—you have made a foe of me instead of a friend, and I tell you I will not be scorned though I may be hated. You cannot remain long at Oakfield Hall. I know old Burnet will never tolerate you, and when he thrusts you out, my turn will come."

He seized the wrist of the frightened girl, and gnashing his teeth with all the energy of a most malignant and diabolical nature, grasped that wrist so firmly as to make her scream with the pain he inflicted.

"Villain!" shouted Goodman, "If you don't let go the child's wrist, I'll fell you to the ground."

Hardbottle did relinquish his grasp, but it was only to enable him to draw his dagger, which he brandished bravely as he advanced. It was not, however, his intention to use it; having driven Goodman a few paces back, he returned to Susan, gazed at

her for a moment, scowled upon her his most horrible scowl, stamping violently on the earth as he meditated some clever revenge, and brandishing his weapon as if he would have used it if he had dared. Still he appeared infirm of purpose, and knew not how to express his malignity, but at length spying the girl's long black ringlets, which had got loose from her head-gear, he seized upon one and half tore it from her head, saying, "I will keep this to remind me of my revenge which shall never leave my mind night or day."

Susan screamed aloud from pain and fear; and apprehensive of the consequences of his rashness, Jack retired. Forgetful of his age, Goodman would have followed him, had not his companion restrained him, and they again pursued their way to Oakfield Hall. The good old man breathed nothing but indignation and scorn against the unmanly and ruffianly conduct of Hardbottle; but when Susan became less agitated, she persuaded him to conceal the matter; she represented

the alarm it might cause her parents—pointed out that it was evident the man mistook her for some other person, and reminded him of the mysterious assemblage they had seen in the wood; there was evidently some secret combination in existence, which by intruding into, they might bring disaster, and perhaps ruin, upon themselves and their friends. She urged that nothing was more dangerous than being the depository of the secrets of others.

Goodman at length yielded to her solicitations, though he made a mental reservation to keep both his eyes and ears open, if compelled to shut his mouth. Susan had also an additional motive for secrecy, for it suddenly flashed across her mind, that the men they had seen in the wood, as well as her persecutor, were all connected with some plot in which her brother was concerned; Hardbottle had mentioned his name, and inferred that he was his friend. For some few minutes they walked on in silence, which, at length, was broken by Goodman exclaiming :

"I have it! I have it! my poor memory had nearly forsaken me—but now it flashes like lightning upon me—I am certain it is ——"

"What is it that comes so suddenly upon your mind?" asked Susan.

"That, that is the villain who robbed me!"

"Are you sure it was he?"

"As certain as that I see you at this moment! but 'tis no use saying anything about it, as we may get both Blanche and your brother into trouble—so, my dear child, we must hear, see, and say nothing."

To this Susan assented, and a few minutes after they ended their eventful walk by reaching Oakfield Hall.

CHAPTER XII.

IT is necessary before bidding the reader good night, after a day of many events, that we follow James Burnet's footsteps when he left the "Royal Oak," in company with his more than questionable friend, Frank Middleton. Truly it was a momentous evening, as regarded the fates and fortunes of many of those in whom we are interested, that is, presuming, dear readers, that you are interested in our simple history.

Some hours have elapsed since we first set out with Thomas Goodman and his god-daughter on a visit to the cottage in which Blanche Stewart resided. The events of this

great machine, called the world, moving, as they do, like the interminable wheels and springs and levers of any other great machine, at one and the same time, have a somewhat confusing effect on those who have to record these events, because what is simultaneous, must with them be, or appear to be, successive; hence it is, that we have lingered so long on the occurrences of a single night. We will hazard another wise reflection,—and one which has become a proverb—it may be fancy, or it may be fact, but it has always appeared to us, that when an uncommon and exciting event takes place, it is sure to be followed by a host of others, thus verifying the adage that, “misfortunes seldom come singly;” not only does this occur to individuals but to nations, for how often do we witness a country enjoying a long and uninterrupted peace, suddenly plunged into a quarrel with some smaller state, which quarrel is rapidly followed by wars of enormous magnitude. Thus a fort-

night of comparative quiet has elapsed since the robbery, and then how many occurrences were crowded into a few hours.

We have hinted at a conversation which took place between young Burnet and his friend Middleton ; a conversation which had important results on the fortunes of both, and by means of which Burnet was apprised of a secret conspiracy, which had for its object the complete overthrow of the Government of James the Second, and the placing of Prince William of Orange on the throne of his father-in-law.

The dissatisfied people of Great Britain (and they were numerous) had for some time turned their eyes towards the Netherlands, and the great supporter of the Protestant Faith (as William might justly be termed), as a refuge from the bigotted and cruel despotism of their present monarch ; but the utter failure of the ill-fated Monmouth, and the frightful atrocities and severities exercised by the hated Jeffereys, rendered men extremely

careful of again committing themselves ; and though many groaned beneath the burden of oppression, few entered into combinations, which, if discovered, might be construed into treason. Still, there were some of the best, as well as some of the worst of men, who in defiance of the atrocities committed, again prepared to risk both life and property for the rights and liberties of their fellow-men. Some were induced to join in the conspiracy from the free spirit of Englishmen, which has always spurned civil and political bondage—others, from the pure love of Protestantism, which has always rejected the fetters of religious domination—and many, of whom Frank Middleton was a type, from that restless desire for change, and that recklessness which leads its possessors to think *any* change an improvement. Middleton had hoped that James Burnet would join the party, and therefore led him to the place of deliberation—the Outhouse we have before named ; not that Frank proposed at once to introduce his friend to the

conspirators, but he thought that a sight of the assembly (without themselves being seen) would give a reality to the faction, far beyond a cold description ; so having first hinted the affair, they walked together to the wood.

Middleton had numerous reasons for wishing Burnet to become one of their number, independent of the acquisition he might be to the cause; for he had been accustomed to look, with much confidence, to him in all the reckless and daring exploits in which they had been engaged together. There was that in his firm and determined spirit which induced the light-hearted gambler to repose confidence in him, as well as to augur success to any enterprise in which they might embark. Moreover there was Lawton —he whom we have seen interfering in behalf of Blanche—who with domineering mind and haughty demeanour, had by degrees made himself master and leader of the faction ; and Frank hoped that Burnet would oppose the tyranny of this man, as strenuously as he

would the despotism of James Stuart. But Burnet was not so eager to join the conspirators as his friend had expected, although he felt indignant at the state of political affairs, and lamented as much as any man the degradation to which the civil and religious freedom of the nation had been reduced.

At this juncture, however, he was groaning beneath the burden of private affliction, and it is a rare thing for public grievances to interest a man very deeply, when he is suffering from personal sorrows, unless the two are in some way connected ; then, indeed, he becomes magnanimously patriotic. We do not wish to paint our hero as either apathetic or indifferent to the wrongs under which his country was suffering, but he was more anxious just then about the fate of Blanche Stewart.

When Frank first named the faction at the Royal Oak, he made use of Blanche's name as a lure, and so far he was politic ; but here again he was met by a principle in the nature

of Burnet, with which he could by no means sympathise. The feeling that however honourable the objects of the conspiracy in themselves, if he entered into the combination, for the private purpose of aiding himself and Blanche, to him it was anything but the noble and public spirited project that some of the faction boasted. There was a delicacy and refinement of honourable feeling in this sentiment into which Middleton could not have entered, and Burnet did not give him the opportunity, for he said nothing of it, but felt it nevertheless.

Engaged in earnest conversation upon these topics, the companions entered the wood, and made for the place of rendezvous. Burnet became aware that great caution was used, for more than once did a man make his appearance from among the trees, and receive from Middleton a muttered word or two, after which they were permitted to pass on. These meetings had the air of being accidental, but Burnet felt convinced there was vigilant

watch maintained, and ample excuse would have been found to turn a stranger back.

As they approached the Outhouse they could see, through the many crevices and apertures, stray lights within, as well as hear the buzz of numerous voices. A regular sentinel, well armed, answered Frank's passwords. Permitted thus to approach the place of meeting, Middleton led his companion to one side of the building, against which several trunks of trees had been piled. Climbing to the top of these, they were enabled to peep through a broken board so as to overlook the whole assembly. It was both a striking and unusual spectacle. The red glare of torches, stuck in the earthen floor, mingled with the light of as many lanterns suspended from the roof, cast a peculiar radiance upon the men present, giving to the whole scene more the air of romance than a reality. The principal group was collected about a common deal table, at which a gentleman was sitting, and, by the help of a candle, stuck in a wine

bottle, reading aloud a letter. But imagine Burnet's surprise, when he discovered that this man was no less a person than the Rev. Thomas Springfield, the amiable and venerable pastor of Thorpeton, a man respected and beloved by the whole population of the village as well as the surrounding neighbourhood for his active and never tiring benevolence, as well as for his courteous demeanour.

Frank Middleton had calculated much upon the effect that, witnessing the active part the reverend gentleman took in the enterprise, would produce on James, though not altogether such as was anticipated; there was mingled sorrow and surprise: sorrow that the worthy pastor should be involved in so dangerous a proceeding, and surprise to find him so actively engaged in an undertaking of both difficulty and danger. Burnet, however, was not aware of the deep and fervent energy and zeal which sometimes lies hidden beneath the exterior of a placid and benign demeanour. This was exemplified in Mr. Springfield, who

thought deeply and felt warmly, though he spoke slowly. He considered the holy religion of which he was a sincere servant to be in danger, and the latent spark of energy, which lurked beneath his amiable and peaceful temper, had been roused into a flame. The hair of the reverend gentleman had assumed a silvery grey, and some few wrinkles had broken the expanse of a high forehead, but his complexion was as ruddy and healthful as could be desired ; he was somewhat corpulent, but tall ; his voice was not particularly loud, but it was harmonious and clear, and as unbroken as a bell.

Beside the clergyman, with a countenance of most imposing importance, his elbow placed upon the table, his hand behind his ear, the better to catch every word of the letter, sat Sir Richard Jenkins, who was constantly nodding his head in assent at the successive clauses of the epistle, and pressing the arm of a young man who sat next to him to direct the attention of the said young man to what

he considered the most salient points. The arm aforesaid lay upon the table in a listless posture, and belonged to a body rather richly dressed, which body belonged to a head rather poorly furnished, which arm, head, and body belonged to no less a person than the nephew of Lady Esther Vince, the late mistress of Blanche Stewart. The face of this youngster, which was very handsome, but very unintellectual, ternately travelled from Mr. Springfield, who was reading the letter, to Sir Richard, who was pressing his arm, as if anxious to understand the meaning of both, but unable to comprehend either, though evidently under the entire influence of Sir Richard, whose restless spirit had led him into the conspiracy into which he had also dragged his young friend, who had never learnt the useful lesson or acquired the moral power of saying "No."

On the opposite side to Sir Richard, and near to the worthy divine, sat one whose dress and manners were now becoming out of date,

though they had been well known in the preceding reigns to belong to the Puritans. Something there was of the high crowned hat, something of the stiff and formal cut in the black clothes of the present specimen which might remind one of the days of the Long Parliament; yet there was a certain stamp of more modern costume that would have contrasted strongly with the veritable Puritans of the past generation; among Puritans he would have looked more like a man of the world; among men of the world he appeared like like a Puritan. Whatever might have been his looks and appearance, the Independent was a man of sense, a man of honour, and a gentleman; he was brought into the conspiracy by his intense hatred of Popery. He sat erect, his folded arms resting upon the heavy hilt of his long rapier, his eye fixed upon the face of the clergyman, his lips compressed, and his eye beaming with triumph as the sentiments of the writer occasionally agreed with his own.

At the opposite end of the table was a man of sinister and unprepossessing aspect, but as his eyes were generally cast down, their expression could only be caught when he occasionally lifted them to bestow a stealthy glance at the countenances of those around, and, as it seemed, to gather their opinions of the letter. This man was Lawton. There were many others present, but as these alone have to do with our present history, we have selected them as a specimen.

There were many of the small proprietors of the neighbourhood grouped near the table, as well as several of the more humble grades, friends of Lawton, seated round the torches on the floor, the deliberations of these latter not a little strengthened, if not exalted, by the free use of ardent spirits.

Having allowed his friend to look for some time on this assemblage, Middleton pressed Burnet's arm, and reminded him that it would be dangerous to be discovered in their present position. With this hint they crept

silently off the timbers and commenced retracing their steps to the "Royal Oak." Middleton was surprised at the taciturnity of his companion during their walk, and it was in vain that he urged him to make some explicit declaration of his sentiments. All that Frank could obtain in the way of promise was, that James would think over the subject, and at all events maintain inviolable secrecy as to the existence of the plot.

Middleton left him with some disappointment, and Burnet did indeed deliberate, the result of which was, that he determined to the best of his abilities to disperse the faction before it involved many, of whose worth and excellence he was convinced, in utter ruin. His first impression was that he would apply to Sir Richard Jenkins or the Rev. Mr. Springfield, and avowing his knowledge of the combination, urge them by every means in his power to dissolve the meetings. He felt that he had a delicate as well as a difficult and dangerous part to play, being fully

aware that to circumvent the schemes of such desperate men as Middleton, Lawton, and some others would probably bring down upon himself their dire animosity ; but he could not bear the idea that such kind-hearted men as Mr. Springfield should be linked in common cause with mere adventurers.

CHAPTER XIII.

JAMES the Second had been upon the throne of Great Britain about three years anterior to the date of our tale. He was no favorite of the people prior to his exaltation, and he began his reign with acts as unwise as they were unpopular, for he took no trouble to conciliate the good-will of his subjects, nor did he trouble himself with precautions to secure his authority, and, throwing off every kind of moderation, became at once both the political and religious bigot. He had not the common prudence to wait for those grants which would in due course have been levied, pro-

bably with little or no opposition from the legislative body.

But the great cause of dissatisfaction with the people was his determination to overturn the Established Religion in favor of Popery. Without for a moment wishing to discuss the merits or demerits of that creed, it is obvious that any system of religion forced upon the consciences of men at the point of the sword will become the object of their scorn and their abhorrence. Religious persecution, when carried on by the established system, is both odious and abominable, but if it be possible to aggravate the atrocity of such a thing, it is a persecution carried on by a *minority*, and opposed to the principles of the great body of the community. Yet such was the attempt of James the Second—an attempt both at variance with the wisdom of the serpent and harmlessness of the dove.

The rebellion of the ill-fated Monmouth diverted for awhile the attention both of King and people, and was so far favorable to

the monarch that it engendered that spirit of loyalty which loves to rally round the throne. The horrible cruelties which followed that abortive attempt, however, displayed the sanguinary nature of the *man*, as his previous conduct had betrayed the incompetent character of the monarch. The execution of Monmouth farther roused public indignation. They could not but compassionate the hapless nobleman, allured by the hopes of pardon to sign a declaration of his illegitimacy, and then, with wanton cruelty, condemned to death. He was followed to the scaffold by a large number of sympathising spectators, and the incidents of his execution greatly heightened public opinion in his favor. Other executions followed, but they all sank into insignificance. Men saw their fellow subjects hanged by hundreds, and juries forced by threats and menaces to find them guilty. It mattered not how high or how benevolent the men and women who were marked out for condemnation; they were

ruthlessly murdered. James went madly on, regardless of the opinions or affections of his people, with blind devotedness to one object, that of converting England to the Romish faith ; but as we have said, conversion at the sword's point is a most dangerous and precarious thing. Men are apt to wince at such sharp controversy, and to withstand such striking arguments.

Such was the state of public affairs at the period of our tale. The birth of a son to the Queen of James the Second, while it gave to the King the hope of undisputed succession in his family, deeply disappointed both the English nation and the heir presumptive—William of Orange. Public patience was tried to the utmost ; men had endured the evils of despotism, hoping that an end would be put to it by the succession of the Prince, whenever death should release them from the thraldom of the present monarch ; but now their hopes were crushed, their impatience fired, by the prospect of a succession in that

family which had made themselves so odious. How often in this world do we look upon events that happen to us as the greatest misfortune that could befall us, and how frequently those events turn out to be the greatest blessings in after life.

James was supremely happy at the birth of his son, imagining that it would be the surest means of perpetuating the succession, when it turned out to be the proximate cause of the loss of it. Public prejudice ran so high that reports were circulated that it was not the Queen's child, but had been brought into her apartment in a surreptitious manner. This idle gossip, however unworthy of serious reflection, serves to display the temper of the times. If the people of England felt annoyed and disappointed at this event, how much more so did the Prince of Orange, who had been on friendly terms with his father-in-law, and mutual kindnesses had passed between them.

William had been content with his col-

lateral claim upon the throne, while it remained undisturbed by a direct descendent, but when he saw himself shut out by the birth of an heir apparent, his disappointed ambition, around which the wishes of an oppressed people seemed to throw a halo of public spirit, led him to deeper designs than he had hitherto entertained—to more active measures than he had hitherto taken. Secret emissaries from Holland were believed to be resident in England, and the person whom we have thought proper to call Lawton was supposed to be one of them; but if so, his whole conduct was greatly at variance with that of the Prince, whose principal object was to feel the pulse of public opinion, and cautiously to abstain from what might be considered treasonable practices.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEVER did May-day morning burst forth with greater brilliancy than on the occasion upon which we have to comment. The deep blue skies would have been cloudless but for a light vapour which floating high up in the Heavens, and, catching the early rays of the sun, became tinged with a silvery hue. The huge trees had just put forth their tender leaves, whilst the later sorts were budding in all the beauty of the early Spring. The magnificent horse-chesnut, however, was already in full blossom, and the white thorn breathed its somewhat faint fragrance into the morning air. The woods around Oakfield reposed in

calm serenity, putting forth their various tints of delicate, delicious green. The old weather-stained and ruinous chapel of the Priory harmonised admirably with the scene, its fantastic pinnacles and broken arches, dotted with the dark green ivy, or adorned with bright green mosses. Over all was the freshness of early morning, which imparts gladness to the heart, elasticity to the step, and makes the spirit revel in the mere consciousness of existence. But while the serenity and peacefulness of nature was thus maintained, man was preparing to break it without remorse. The songs of innumerable birds had hitherto alone disturbed the silence of the woods; but suddenly the discordant combination of fifes and fiddles, marrow bones and cleavers, mingled with the shouts of men, the shrill shrieks of women, and the whistle of boys, aroused the inmates of Oakfield Hall, and ushered in a motley group upon the green-sward in front of the house, where a score or two of men and women were soon assembled,

carrying large boughs of whitethorn and garlands of flowers, their arms decorated with gay ribbons. The peasantry had been sorely puzzled in their election of a Queen of the May, a point of great solemnity, and, consequently, due consideration was required and expended. Poor Blanche Stewart had been duly elected, and they had no time for deliberation upon a second choice, for, of course, it was determined that Blanche's misfortunes (as some maliciously called them) would entirely prevent her assuming the dignity.

The worthy electors were greatly perplexed—not only was there brief time for so important a deliberation, but it was not easy to find a person in every respect so desirable as Blanche; it was not that there was any scarcity of maidens in the neighbourhood, but one was too old, another too young, one was good-tempered but somewhat ugly, another was pretty but not good-tempered, both which attributes were absolutely essential. Then

again, one had an elder sister who would be offended, another a peevish mother who would not consent; in short, there were innumerable difficulties in supplying the place poor Blanche had been so unanimously elected to fill—she was so precisely the sort of person required—her beauty, her vivacity, her high spirits, were all what they wanted for their Queen.

After a long debate, which would have done honor to a higher assembly, the choice fell upon Susan Burnet. The electors did not for a moment dream of a refusal, for though the maiden was not accustomed to mix with her neighbours, and her love of solitude was well known, yet not for a moment did they imagine any woman could possibly refuse such an honor. The time of our history was one in which the festive sports and pastimes were peculiarly cultivated; puerile and rude they may have been, yet they were characterised by that glee and joyousness which marked the good old times of Merrie England.

. The master of the revels, or Baron Bombast, as he was designated, approached. He was a thin, tall, cadaverous man, habited in black, with a brown paper cap covering his head, on the top of which was secured a pewter platter, apparently intended to represent a scholar's cap. In his hand he held a white wand of office, and his admirable assumption of a dignified scholar made him a capital Baron Bombast. This worthy was no other than Master Overwise, the village schoolmaster, and if anything could have enhanced the delight of the boys and girls it was to have such a man for the office on such a joyous morning as May Day. What comparison could there possibly be between the mummeries and processions permitted by the Church of Rome upon certain festal occasions and the present uproarious glee of a host of school children at their stultification of their pedagogue? What could exceed the pleasure of being permitted for this one day to play all sorts of tricks upon their schoolmaster? How

did the awe of the other three hundred and sixty-four days enhance the enjoyment of this? Many a pull of the skirts and kick of the calves did the Domine sustain, and even the trencher cap stood in imminent danger from some sly urchin's well-aimed turnip. But Master Overwise bore all with profound gravity and excellent good humour. With a flourish of his wand he stepped forward, and began, in a pompous tone the following oration :—

“ My worthy masters and mistresses, and representatives of the Borough of Thorpeton, into whose hands the free electors of this honourable usage have committed their judgments, which judgments I am bound to say have very little weight, and are of no value, either to the owners or any body else. That you know what I am about to say, I feel certain you are ignorant, and I am the more pleased that it is so because you will possibly the better understand what I do say when I say it. Not that I would throw the slightest

discredit on your heads, which are both large and thick heads, but I wish more particularly to address myself to your ears, which I am equally bound to say are both great and long ears, and every body knows what great and long ears are a sign of. And as life is short and brief, as a lawyer would say, and very uncertain, for no man knows how soon he may be overtaken by the undertaker, I come to the point. I will divide my *tale* into three *heads*, namely: —the matter, the subject, and the object. The matter, as your big heads will, perhaps, comprehend, is May-Day; the subject is the May Queen; and the object to choose that May Queen. Now, no one with head and ears, such as I am addressing myself to, will, for a moment, venture to dispute the case, that a thing that is fixed is soon settled, and as you are all aware it was unanimously resolved and settled and determined upon late last night, that Susan Burnet should be our May Queen. So I put it to you,

worthy electors, shall Susan Burnet be May Queen?"

According to the good old English custom this humorous oration was hailed with shouts, such as made the woods ring again, and which shouts were re-echoed by a crowd of persons who were approaching. One of the clod-poles was heard to whisper to a companion:

"Goodness me, did ever any mortal man talk as well as Master Overwise does it."

"Ay, my lad," said his companion, "see what it is to be book-learned, why, he did it better than even our parson could."

The whole scene was rustic and simple, but nevertheless it was not devoid of interest to any one who can feel happiness in seeing happiness. On rolled the stream of human beings, bounding and capering upon the green-sward, truly a motley as well as a tumultuous throng. One man was dressed in Lincoln green to personate Robin Hood, with a buxom black-eyed girl hanging on his arm, attired in

pink petticoat and black boddice, to represent Maid Marion. This couple seemed to consider themselves somewhat above the mass of the people, taking little notice of the rest of the crowd ; they were evidently a pair of lovers whose attention seemed equally divided between their dress and each other. It was really amusing to witness the imperturbable politeness of Lincoln green towards the more vulgar characters, or to see how Maid Marion glanced from her lover's eyes to her pink petticoat, or from the pink petticoat to her lover's eyes. Another couple decked with ribbons and flowers, the man in cocked hat and powdered wig, with sword and staff ; the female in hanging sleeves and train for the day— my lord and lady. His lordship danced a sort of minuet with great gravity, his head held high up in the air, his dignity sadly discomposed by the merry laughing romping girl, who had already danced her dress below her white shoulders, and trodden her train off to enable the bystanders to see her pretty

ankles. But the most remarkable figure in the play, was a stout, cross-grained, snarling old man, stuffed out to an enormous size, with straw, and mounted upon a donkey to typify Sir John Barleycorn.

After these came a waggon on four wheels, drawn by as many sleek horses, in which was raised a kind of arbour, formed of green boughs, among which the May-blossom was predominant, overshadowing a throne to be occupied by the May Queen. This canopy had wasted the time, and roused the taste and the energies of the village lasses for many days past, and four of the prettiest now stood behind it, decked with smiles, and ribbons, roses, and blushes, as maids of honour to their sovereign lady.

“ You’re wrong ! quite wrong !” cried the snarling Sir John Barleycorn ; “ ugh ! ugh !” a short cough impeding his speech, “ you’re wrong, I tell you, Master Overwise. I’ve played the play a hundred times on May-day, and never before did I ever see

the bower-women come afore the garland bearers."

The Pedagogue eyed Sir John Barleycorn with the most sovereign contempt; but the old grumbler went on, nothing daunted, but somewhat out of breath with his cough, caused by the hard trotting of his donkey.

"I tell you, Master Overwise, you are wrong, for I have seen little Snip, the tailor, play the master of the revels better than any I ever did see. He was a merry fellow, too, afore he died."

"Well, peace to his memory," said the schoolmaster, somewhat impatiently, "I've heardl that he was like his own buckram—stiff."

"No such thing, no such thing; but where is the Queen of the May?"

"She has not condescended to honour us with a sight of her royal face; but do not be impatient, Sir John, I will invoke her, and she will descend to bless the eyes of her loving subjects. Stand aside, ye masters and

mistresses of the borough of Thorpeton, while I pour forth, in eloquent verse, the overflowing of a loving and loyal heart:

“There’s none on earth to whom we owe such duty,
As our loved Queen of such *beafic* beauty.”

“Hallo ! hallo !” exclaimed Sir John, “what do you mean by *beafic*; that’s Hebrew or some other Popish lingo; and I’ll be bound it’s something indecent, and not fit to be spoken to a lady.”

“Indecent!” cried the offended poet, “why it’s Latin, man.”

“I thought as much, it’s just the lingo the lawyers and doctors talk, and not fit for women’s ears.”

“Stupid dolt!” thought the schoolmaster, and then said aloud—

“But thou art in error this time, most sapient sapientissimus, for *beafic* is only a contraction for *beatific*, which would make the line a foot too long.”

“A foot too long, why didn’t you cut off

the other feet, and then we should have been spared the nonsense."

Master Overwise, however, did not condescend to take any further notice, except by another withering look of contempt upon the wheezing old man, and then went on with his invocation.

"With eyes quite as bright,
And as full of light:
As either sun or moon,
Or the belt of Orion?"

"O'Ryan ! O'Ryan ! who the devil's O'Ryan ? " shouted Sir John.

"Stop not my invocation, old man.

"By all that's dear to love, beauty and thee,
We invoke thee to crown our festivity."

"Ugh ! ugh ! I have played—"

Here the garrulous old man was interrupted by the appearance of old Burnet, his wife, and an old woman who had for many years acted as servant in the family, and whose appearance we will now describe. Rebecca Stumps, for so she was named, was

notoriously the ugliest old woman in the county. Her nose and chin forming that peculiar approximation which denotes the absence of teeth ; her grey eyes appeared to look up and down at the same moment, with something beyond a squint, and her long chin was covered with a most masculine down.

“ My neighbours and friends,” said Master Burnet ; “ I wish ye all a happy May Day, and I hope ye will enjoy the sports and pastimes for many years to come.”

“ I have played the play,” interrupted Sir John Barleycorn.

“ Silence ! silence ! ” shouted the crowd, and Burnet proceeded.

“ My daughter begs me to thank you, and to tell you how proud she feels of the honour.”

“ No honour at all, Master Burnet ; the honour is conferred upon us, and we all feel the honour she confers upon us,” interrupted the schoolmaster.

“But, my friends, ye misunderstand me ; my daughter is greatly distressed at being compelled to disappoint you ; she is too ill to leave her bed this morning, and entreats you to find a more befitting queen.”

For some time there was perfect silence, and deep disappointment might be seen in every countenance Master Burnet, finding that no response was made, found himself compelled to proceed—

“I am truly grieved, neighbours—truly sorry to spoil your sport, and I should only be too pleased—too glad—if by any means in my power I could mend matters—but in truth my daughter is not fitted for the honourable part your kindness would have allotted her. She has been the witness of the death of a poor neighbour, and the sight wrought upon her feelings, together with anxious watching, has been too much for her to bear.”

“That would be poor old dame Stewart,” said one in the crowd. “I am told too that Susan Burnet was with her when she died and

that she went there with a dashing young fellow in a hat and feathers to see Blanche."

"Truly Master Burnet you have every right in the world to choose your friends," said Overwise gravely, "and if you prefer for your daughter the companionship of Blanche Stewart and such as she, instead of our society, we have no right to complain—but I must say—"

"You do me great wrong, Master Overwise, I give no countenance to Blanche Stewart," returned old Burnet.

"And if you did," continued the schoolmaster, "it's no business of ours, for most certainly the light-o-love of young James Burnet has a claim—"

"Not upon me, Sir," observed old Burnet firmly; "that unhappy girl comes not into my presence, and as for my son—"

"It concerns me not, Master Burnet," cried the schoolmaster, drawing himself up to his full height. "I had nothing to do with his teaching, if I had, I might, perhaps, have instructed

the youth in good morals as well as sound learning—but you sent him to Norwich—and of course you had a right to do so if it pleased you—but that, as I said before, is nothing to us, and if Miss Susan holds her head so high above her neighbours, we must do as well as we can without her."

"You think too seriously of this," interposed Burnet.

"It is our duty to think seriously of it—so strike up, my merry men, and let's away to the green."

"I tell you what, Master Overwise," roared out a grinning clodpole, "if Burnet's lass go out o' nights, with such gay fellows as was with her at Dame Stewart's—I'm thinkin there ain't a bit to chuse betwixt she and Blanche for our May Queen."

This was received with a hearty demonstration, by loud shouts of laughter, and clapping of hands, and seemed at once to put the crowd into high spirits, and the Master of the

Revels took advantage of the occasion to rally his followers.

"Hark ye, my jolly companions," he cried, "we came here for the purpose of electing our May Queen and a Queen we will have. Now, it is my opinion, that as we cannot have youth, beauty, and—and—virtuous—hem ! hem ! I think we cannot do better than select one whose ugliest—hem ! hem ! what say ye to one whose age and ugliest—hem ! hem ! wisdom and venerable years will give dignity to the high station. It will be better, methinks, than youth and giddiness, so give me the Crown of Flowers, and we'll all do homage to Rebecca Stumps."

Nothing could have hit the temper of the crowd better than this masterly stroke of policy, which was received with most uproarious shouts of applause and loud peal upon peal of laughter. The jest was in such strict character with the occasion and so admirably timed, that Rebecca Stumps was elected by unanimous consent and acclamation, and

Master Overwise with most ludicrous grimace, after placing the wreath of flowers upon her head with the dignity of a Lord Chamberlain, handed the old lady into the waggon, or rather the throne, we should say.

This piece of bye-play again called forth tumultuous applause, and gave fresh spirit to the people—which, however, was at length, after a temporary lull interrupted by the wheezing old Sir John Barleycorn, crying “I have seen the play a hundred times, but upon my word, my men, I never did see the likes of that.”

Had Blanche or Susan accepted the dignity, they could not have been greeted with more enthusiasm, or longer or louder plaudits, and nothing could exceed the merriment of the whole crowd when Rebecca rose from her seat and began bobbing and bowing to those around; the men roared, the women screamed and the boys shouted, one and all convulsed with laughter. The fun and folly was so unexpected, that it was con-

sequently the more enjoyable. As for the village band, they rivalled each other in their endeavours to give effect to the scene —the piper appeared as if he intended to puff his cheeks out, he blew so vigorously—and the drummer thumped his drum as if determined to knock the head in; whilst the dogs, which are sure to form a part of every assemblage, barked and capered about in the most extraordinary manner, running and jumping, and upsetting children by bolting between their legs, and escaping in a most marvellous way out of every dilemma in a manner none but dogs could do.

The person to whose care the waggon was entrusted, anxious to show his loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen of the May, whipped his horses into a trot, and seemed to do his best to get the wheels into the roughest ruts, so that the poor Queen, whilst bowing and bobbing to her subjects, was compelled to hold fast to the canopy of boughs, her ludicrous appearance heightened by the

unheard of conduct of her Maids of Honour, who, tumbled and screamed at every jolt of the waggon, and with their dress disordered and their hair flying about in all directions, also grasped at the covering of boughs, which became strewed about the bottom of the waggon so as to form a carpet of green.

In this manner the procession, before and behind, went on at full speed, and so uproarious and ludicrous became the spectacle, that even Sir John Barleycorn gave way, and with a smile, spurred his steed into a canter. Two or three young men, who, it is presumed, preferred beauty to mirth, were the last to depart, disappointed and sullen, and muttering something about the abominable ambition of the Burnets, who were too high and mighty to mix with their equals, and prophesying that pride would have a fall.

Old Burnet cast a sorrowful look after the crowd, and in bitterness of heart exclaimed: "The friendship of man is worthless."

CHAPTER XV.

THE procession was not long in reaching the village Green, where they were received by a large number of persons who had not thought it worth while to go to the Priory—among those, no one was more conspicuous or more anxious than mine host of ‘The Royal Oak’; who, no sooner discovered the face and figure of the May Queen, than he literally roared with laughter, and exclaimed :

“ Why, my lads, what in the name of all that’s beautiful, have you got here? I expected to see a delicate lamb, and ye have gotten ewe mutton.”

“ Hold thy unknightly and ungallant

tongue, Master Boniface," exclaimed Overwise; "for by St. George of England, I take upon myself to defend, as a true knight, the fame, the beauty, and the honor of this our Queen, against all comers. She has been graciously pleased to add lustre to our sports, as well as giving them her countenance."

Here such an outburst of hilarity broke forth, that the schoolmaster was no longer able to keep down his risibility, and burst into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"Capital—capital!" roared Boniface, as soon as the noise subsided. "We are all mortally obliged to her majesty—why, my friends, there's fun in the very face of the thing."

"Face, sir," shouted Overwise; "she has indeed got a face—"

"Aye, aye," roared Boniface, "she has indeed a face longer than most folk, and—"

"What do you know about faces—why, our Queen's is a model for a sculptor—"

"A genuine antique," cried mine host.

“True, true, as you say, it is an antique face; but you see it is strongly marked, and the lines of beauty are deeply engraven.”

“Confound it, Master Overwise, you make the lovely Rebecca blush,” cried a young farmer.

“Blush; yes, like boiling a lobster, from black to red,” cried another.

“Well, but where is Susan Burnet?” asked Boniface.

“Name her not! name her not! She scorns her equals—she may yet live to shame her friends. Name her not; but let us proceed with the sports of the day.”

“I have played the play a hundred times, and I tell you, Master Overwise, the Queen should descend,” cried Sir John Barleycorn.

“Then be it so, Sir John;” and bowing in a most courteous manner, Overwise requested her majesty to quit her garlanded throne.

This part of the ceremony again called forth roars of laughter; for no sooner did her Maids of Honor come forward to assist her

to alight, than Rebecca Stump waved them off with her hand in a right royal manner, and sprang from the vehicle with the agility of a girl of sixteen.

The procession was speedily arranged, and the whole crowd moved off towards the May Pole, the top of which, adorned with a long streamer, might be seen over the lofty trees. The bells of the village church rang a merry peal, and the pipes and drums, and other instruments, struck up what was meant to be a merry tune, but which, to musical ears, was a most discordant medley. The hamlet, as well as the woods, resounded with the shouts of children and women who had gone forth to obtain flowers and evergreens, especially the May-thorn, to decorate their houses, as well as to adorn the old church, a custom never neglected on May Day. There were others, too, roaming the woods, who preferred the bright eye and the sunny smile to revelry—who met the beloved object of their heart, and strolled about the beautiful

glades, spending a happy summer morning. There were others, and far different roamers, beneath the shelter of the fine trees—such as indulged in darker and guiltier passions.

Two men, whose dress and bearing were above those of the peasantry, stole somewhat suspiciously along the glades of the wood. The first was Lawton, whom we have seen so successfully interfering in behalf of Blanche Stewart ; though, whether his interference arose from kindly motives, we somewhat question. He was a dark, fierce-looking man, whose features had evidently been tanned by exposure to foreign suns ; he had allowed his hair to grow so long that it hung about his shoulders. There was a certain nobleness in his features, and an aristocratic bearing not to be mistaken ; but so fierce and lowering was his brow, that he was anything but a pleasing object to look upon. He was dressed precisely as when we first met him in the room of Justice. His companion, though not in any way resembling the peasantry, was

evidently an inferior ; he, too, was wrapped in a dark cloak, and his face also bore the marks of foreign climes. He kept close behind his master, who paced the mazes of the wood, as if he had been familiar with their intricacies all his life. They stopped not until they reached the Out-houses, the identical place said to be haunted. It was truly an old-looking building, composed principally of wood, but time had made sad ravages in the roof. A couple of large doors in the front were carefully locked, but the men, walked round to another side of the building, and Lawton took from his pocket a key, which after looking cautiously around, he was about to apply to the lock, when a violent shaking of the other doors startled him from his purpose. He immediately went round to the other side, and there discovered an old man in a grey coat and broad brimmed hat, trying to force an entrance. This was no other than our worthy friend Goodman, who had been so much astonished at what he had

witnessed the preceding night, that he had come by day-light to make an investigation.

It was not his intention to rashly pry into the secret of others, but he imagined the parties he had discovered would shun daylight, and enable him to satisfy his curiosity, or rather, we should say, his suspicions, unobserved. The inferior of the two would have addressed Goodman with an abrupt demand as to what business he had there, but his master, more cautious, motioned him to be silent.

"What is the name of this curious old place, my man?" asked Lawton.

"What, donne ye ken the out-houses? but I axes yer pardon, sir, for I sees as how ye bean't of this country side."

"You are right, my man, I am not; I'm on a visit to Sir Richard Jenkins, of Longmore."

"I beg pardon, sir, I was not axing your affairs; but there bees sich a many gentles come here to see Sir Richard."

"Ah, yes, he keeps open house; but what about these old places?"

"Come, come, sir ; ye're putting upon me. I'm bound ye know a mightier deal more about them than I does."

"I know more about the old places than you do ? I am a stranger. What do you mean, my friend ?"

"I hope no offence, sir ? but don't yer see, I was jist a thinking ye would be one of they gentles as coines to see our good parson ? I have heered him call 'em anti-queer ones, or some sich outlandish name. Why, bless yer heart, sir, they come here diggen for curosi-ties and old chany, and axes all about the old things, and axing us to tell 'em long tales ; and I'll be bound ye're jist wishing to laugh at I, and knows all about these matters better arter all than I does."

"Oh, you take me for one of these diggers, do you ? But tell me, who does this old place belong to ?"

"Why, you see, sir, it belongs to the Oakfield place ; it were a barn in former times, built by the Abbots, long, long ago."

"Why has it been suffered to go into decay?"

"Lor' bless you, sir, haven't yer heered that it be haunted by a bogie; and, as sure as two make two, I saw a light near it last night."

"The devil you did," exclaimed Lawton, exchanging glances with his servant.

"Yees, to be sure I did; and so I e'en thought as how I would jist come and sarch it out by daylight; but it seems as how the bogies don't care for company, for they've fastened the doors up."

"And you really saw a light, my friend?" asked Lawton.

"Aye, as sure as I see your face now."

"How extraordinary," said the artful Lawton; "and did you see the bogie, or anything else?"

"Nothin' but the light—for you may be sartin I didn't stay long—for I thought as how the bogies were arter me."

With this Goodman took off his hat, bowed low, and departed. He had touched upon

the previous evening's affair to see if his interrogator betrayed any emotion, and he dropped it, lest it might draw suspicion upon himself.

"This prying into our movements is occasioned by your carrying that infernal lantern," said Lawton, addressing his servant. "If we are not more cautious we shall lose our heads."

"It was no fault of mine, Sir; that dolt, Sir Richard Jenkins, would be lighted through the wood."

"Sir Richard is a blind owl, that is certain; but he is necessary to our purpose—his house is a good screen for some of us—and he has a tolerably respectable position."

They walked round to the side door, and, having unlocked it, entered the Out-house, which we have before described as being only one spacious room; the floor, partly boarded, was very rotten, and two or three trunks of trees were lying on the ground; a less suspicious-looking place could scarcely be

imagined, except that at one end was a blackened spot where a fire had recently been lighted, and near it an empty bottle ; there was an iron ring fixed to one of the boards, which, upon being pulled up by Lawton, discovered a number of fire-arms concealed beneath.

"They are all right, I believe," he said ; "but it is more than we deserve for our carelessness. Upon my life, I feel half disposed to quit the conspiracy, and England as well. These clumsy dolts have no notion of conducting a plot."

"Where will you go ? The name of Sir Gerald Howard is somewhat too well known all over the Continent."

"That's true enough ; and it is for that very reason I assumed that of Lawton. But I am not likely to require either a name or a country if we are to be thus exposed to suspicion. Who could have expected this fools' holiday, thus filling these woods, usually so secluded, with revellers and pining lovers ?"

"And that old man," said his companion, "with his yarn of bogies. I am more than half inclined to suspect him."

"In that case it would have been better to have secured his person."

"It behoves us to be constantly on our guard, Sir Gerald. We are surrounded by danger. That robbery was a fearful risk for us."

"No matter. I begin to be perfectly reckless, and am determined to force the faction into some decisive step, from which it cannot recede. Besides, I want money, for appearances cannot be kept up without it—but come, these matters must be looked to."

With that they set about scattering the embers of the recent fire, and putting earth over the iron ring, so as not to excite observation, and the bottle was thrown out of the window. After one more look of scrutiny about the room, they quitted the place, but no sooner had they done so, than they, a second time, encountered Goodman. Lawton

started back, and grasped the poniard which he wore in his belt. Goodman, too, was confused, feeling that he had been detected in an evident attempt to watch, but he was the first to recover his equanimity, as he exclaimed :

“ Ha’ ye found any o ’em ? ”

“ Found what ? ” exclaimed Lawton hastily.

“ The bogies. Havn’t ye bin a looking for the bogies ? ”

“ Curse the bogies, and you too, for an old fool ! ”

“ Whist, whist ! donna ye swear at the bogies, they may do ye a mischief ; and donna ye swear at I, who am old enow to be your father. But our parson says, the cussed live long.”

“ Not always,” muttered Lawton.

“ I ha’ dropt my baccy-stopper,” said Goodman, “ and I came back to look for it, and I think it was somewhere hereabouts ; ” and he commenced retracing his steps towards the large doors, looking anxiously amongst the

grass as he proceeded. "I wouldn't lose my baccy-stopper for ever so much money; it was given to me by my old crone, Sarah Lovejoy."

The conspirators kept their eyes steadily fixed upon the old man, as he proceeded round the building, when suddenly he put forth his hand into the grass, exclaiming, "Here it is, here it is." Whether he picked up anything or not is a matter of doubt; but he again saluted the men, and a second time departed.

"I strongly suspect that old man," observed Lawton.

"And, what's worse, I have an idea that he suspects us," returned his servant, whose name was Driscol.

"At any rate he cannot know anything of much consequence. If a discovery should take place I will quit England and leave old Burnet in possession of my paltry estate of Oakfield, and the faction to the fate it so richly deserves."

"I cannot understand why you do not take

possession of that house, Sir Gerald. The members might assemble there in safety."

"I am not so sure of that; at any rate I should have less chance of escape, should flight be necessary. At present as Lawton, I am unnoticed and unknown, but as Sir Gerald Howard, I should draw the eyes of all men upon me; whilst as regards the paltry estate, if I cannot better my fortune than to be merely master of Oakfield Hall, England is no place for me—let's be off to the village and see what's stirring there."

END OF VOL I.

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